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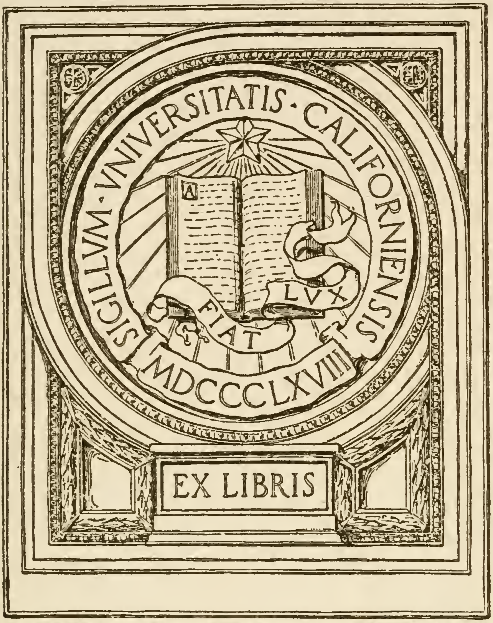
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A MAN OF GENIUS

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WIDDICOMBE

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

A MAN OF GENIUS

A STORY OF THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

BY

M. P. WILLCOCKS

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> " We are children of splendour and flame,
>   Of shuddering, also, and tears.
> Magnificent out of the dust we came,
>   And abject from the Spheres."
>
> WILLIAM WATSON

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMVIII
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD

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TO
JOHN LANE
WHO FIRST TAUGHT
ME TO KNOW AND TO
LOVE HIS OWN WILD
CORNER OF DEVON

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A MAN OF GENIUS

A MAN OF GENIUS

CHAPTER I

THE WIND AMONG THE BARLEY

BY the table stood a man in a sailor's jersey, wearing in his ears the thin rings of gold that seamen suppose to be good for the eyes. From below the house came the myriad voices of a tide that beats against a rock-bound coast; the hiss of spray that breaks on jagged points, the roar of pebbles as a wave recedes, the stifled boom of imprisoned waters that churn the fretted crannies of the cliff. In the grip of the wind-flaws the timbers of the house were straining, as though they were the sides of a storm-tossed vessel, and through the room shone a diffused pallor of steel-grey light, like the reflection from a vast mirror. It was, in truth, the storm-light reflected from the greatest mirror in the world, the sea.

In the light of it John Darracott stood looking down at a small box, roughly embossed in a design of ivy leaves. His jet-black hair and beard were both now faintly threaded with silver, and his quiet eyes, set deep in a swarthy face, were dusky, like the dark shadows on a still pool. Through his great frame the good blood circled steadily with the tide of perfect health, for he had breathed little but the outdoor air all his life. The massive outline of his rough-hewn head, the great jaws that cleft, ridge-like, round his cheeks, all bore the same expression of quiet tenacity. Yet the firm lips could soften into kindly lines. They were so softened now, as he glanced from the box to the sea, his work-broadened hands touching the toy he had made as gently as he would have touched the woman for whom it was meant.

The rising storm outside, the five hours' watch that awaited him, the familiar outlines of his room, had faded in the inner visions of the happiness that he hoped was approaching. Very simple visions they were, for it was mainly a picture of an imaginary corner-cupboard that kindled his eyes into flame, a fancy of all the household conveniences he would put up in this room, if he ever brought home to it the occupant who already flitted there before his mind's eye. The thought of his own tall stature beside the figure of this small person puckered his forehead anxiously, as he calculated the height at which he must fix cupboards and dressers so that she should not strain herself in reaching up to them.

The low-ceiled room, with its bare rafters and clean-scrubbed floor, was like the cabin of a ship kept sweet with the nicety of a sailor's hands. A wreck-wood fire burnt in an old hobbed grate, and one large window, curved like the port-hole of an ancient galleon, looked out to sea. Pinned to the wall were pictures of birds cut from illustrated papers, interspersed with rough daubs of fishes, painted in the vivid colours of fish just taken from the water. In one corner there was also a menagerie of sick beasts, a rabbit-hutch, and a cage or two, for John Darracott had a fine skill in mending the creatures that had come to grief in the battle of life; at one time it would be a bird with a broken wing that inhabited a cage until it could fly again, at another, a rabbit with its leg in splints.

At last the dreamer tore himself from his visions, and, slipping the box into his trouser pocket, opened the house door and stepped out into the roar of sea and wind. On a long ledge of rock crouched a double row of slated, weather-beaten houses, from which rose contorted circles of chimney smoke that eddied over the boiling cauldron of maddened waters that surged just below. Over the edge of the grassy escarpment above this human eyry, five grey donkeys peered with the enquiring faces of abstracted curiosity. Hartland Quay, so called because it had once been a coal wharf, was now half hotel and half farm, and Darracott the sole labourer employed on it, for the farm, being composed chiefly of cliff-pastures, required but little labour.

"You'll mind and be back in time, Darracott," called a voice from the doorway of the main building as he passed, "for it's going to be a dirty night, by the look of it."

"Ay, sir," he answered, as he began to ascend the winding cliff path, "I'll be sure to be back 'gainst 'tis dark. 'Tis looking up ugly and no mistake."

Darracott was one of the nineteen men employed by the local agent for the Board of Trade to work the rocket apparatus at Hartland Quay, and to-night it fell to his turn to watch the sea for the five hours specified in the regulations in case of stormy or foggy weather. For since Hartland Point was a war signal station the coastguard were not required to patrol the coast, but merely to keep a centre, and their work of watching the sea was supplemented by the services of farm labourers who, at the widely separated intervals of the rocket stations, were placed on duty to look for signals of distress from the waterway. It is scarcely a system likely to be of much use on so terrible a shore, built, as it seems, for the mockery of man, the puny, stout-hearted creature of Nature's weakest birth moment.

For this angle of North Devon, which culminates in the rocks of Hartland Point, is a coast given over, in times of storm and mist, to all the forces of destruction. During a winter gale the savagery of the scene is nerve-shattering, for in the shrilling of a sea-mew, in the lash of a breaker, in the contour of a rock outline, there seems to speak the antagonism of the dumb brute forces that resist man and yet clamour in the lust of his rage. To stand in a storm on the cliffs of Hartland is to hear the echoes of the bestial roar of a Bastille crowd, or the yell that rings from a thousand throats at the fall of some human temple of the spirit. The paths traced by the hand of history over the map of the past, blood-stained as they are in reality, seem placid with sunlight beside the irresponsible power that speaks in the crash of the breakers on this iron shore, in the lash of the wind across the lonely heaths, and even in the light that flickers at night over the grass-grown crannies of the cliffs. For the "jacky-lanterns" mock with their light footsteps still, like ghostly wreckers' lights of long ago.

To Darracott, who was familiar enough with the work, the thought of his night's watch was overlaid with the more pressing anxiety as to whether he would be in time for the delight to which he had been looking forward all day, a walk with Thyrza Braund. As he turned away from the sea there rose in the distance before him the splendid tower of Hartland Church, springing from a film of woodland, like a fortress above the houses it protects. This was Darracott's objective, for he knew that Thyrza would be at the Church to-night, helping in the decorations for the harvest festival. At the stile that leads into the churchyard he waited, standing under the tiny avenue of six lime trees. The service was not yet over, for from the windows fell long beams of light, turning the tombstones into spectral forms that bent at strangely human angles. The wind howled round the summit of the tower, as though it would have torn it from its foundations, but below, here in the quiet gloom, there was nothing but the play of light and shadow. To Darracott's ears came the words of the closing hymn—

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?
Jesus has vanquish'd death and all its powers.

So they sang, with the battering-ram of storm overhead, and in their hearts the fear that waits for every life at some turning of the road. To Darracott's throbbing heart this resignation to the will of the Unknown seemed like the wailing of those who have long closed their account with earthly things.

At last, after the few women who made up the congregation had passed down the path, there came the figure for which his eyes had been watching, and with a sudden leap at his heart he came forward to be ready at the stile to help her over.

"I thought you would be here," he said, as she put out her hand.

It was too dark to see plainly the expression of her face, but he knew it by heart.

"You'll let me walk back with you?" he asked, as they turned down the village street, where the friendly eyes of the lighted windows peeped into their faces as they passed. " 'Tis too late for 'ee to go all that way back by yourself."

"Why, I've done it hundreds of times," she said with a laugh.

There was a resonant quality about her voice that lingered pleasantly on the ear, for all the blurred intonation of country roughness.

"And you've a day's work behind you, too," she added, after a pause, for this silent man was rather a perplexity to Thyrza.

"I'd do a deal to get a minute with you, and that you know well enough. Don't you, Thyrza?"

" 'Tisn't what you ought to say to me, though," she said. In the light from a passing trap Darracott caught the flash of a dimple on her round cheek.

" 'Tis your birthday to-day," he said gently, "and I've made a little box for you, if you'll accept of it."

With a round "Oh" of pleasure, Thyrza took the box and looked inside. Within, there reposed three hedge-sparrow's eggs on a layer of cotton wool.

"They're common eggs," he said apologetically, "but they're just the colour of your eyes. That's why I put 'em in."

No one in the neighbourhood knew more than Darracott of the ways of birds and beasts. He could tell where the peregrine falcon had spent one summer, he could have told where a pair of choughs were to be found on the cliffs: he could have, but he did not.

Thyrza laughed as she lifted her eyes to his. Then her glow-worm glance fell before the fierce tenderness of his eyes, and she noticed how his hand trembled as he lifted it to his face. For a moment she tasted the sweetness of her own power, but presently the kindness which was the deepest root of her nature had asserted itself.

"No, no; take it back, Mr. Darracott," she said. "I can't keep it. I can't really."

"You don't like it?"

"Oh, I do, I do. But——"

"But what then?"

" 'Tis so serious," she faltered. "I can't say it proper; but——"

"I put a lot into that box, Thyrza. Much, much more than ever I could show. 'Tis poor work, I know, but when I sat at it I said, 'Thyrza's little fingers 'll touch this, and perhaps she'll think of me.' For you don't know how all these last months you've hardly been out of my mind. Words hurt, when a man means it, but, my dear, you're the very light to my eyes. You've made another man of me. I seem to have been half-dead all the years afore I set eyes on your little face. But now, I'll never be dead again till they lay me in my coffin."

"I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't, indeed."

"Nay, 'tis work that can be done by a look," he laughed.

"And you'll take my box?"

"No, John," she answered, standing still and looking steadily into his face, "I can't. 'Tis beautiful, and I hate to think of giving it back, when you've worked at it so long for me, but I can't take it, John," she said in a low voice, holding it out and looking away, lest she should see the misery in his eyes. "Oh, John, I'm so sorry, so sorry."

His hand closed over the box and her hand that held it. Suddenly Thyrza leant forward and touched his shoulder with her left hand, seeing as she did so the strong ties of kindred nature that bound her to this man; they were moulded of the same clay, born for the same experiences of life, and his rough toil she could understand. Three weeks ago she had watched a group of women huddling together to see the men launch the lifeboat. The storm and the men meant but little to her, for she just wanted to stand among the women, to feel what they felt, even though she had been the weariest and most careworn of them all. This would be her life by the side of John Darracott, a life to whose measure her own heart-strings vibrated, even while her fancy desired quite another fate.

"I'm hungered for you," he said simply. "I want you. I want you. I can't be content without you, my maid."

Every word was a stab to Thyrza, whose sole thought now was to escape.

"No, no," she cried; "I can't, I can't. Never."

Before the sincerity of this he let her hand fall. Then as she touched him gently with her finger tips, he winced.

"Not that," he said savagely. "'Tis a man you'm touching."

His next instinct was the desire to calm her trouble, when he saw her moisten her dry lips, and guessed that her heart was beating wildly like that of a creature just snared.

"Child, never mind, don't grieve," he said. "For, after all, I thank God that 'tis a man you'm touching. I was a stone before, but you've given me a heart, even if it aches."

"Forgive me, John. But I can't, for there's some one else."

After a moment's pause, he said—

"Will 'ee just give me one kiss, my dear. Just to remember 'ee by?"

But as she lifted her face to his, he merely pressed his cheek to hers, and holding her close to him by her clasped hands, whispered, "God made you and life and death. I can feel 'em all now. Don't you fret, my pretty, for you've been a true woman. And if I can't live and die by the side of 'ee, why, there's no law against thought."

"And we'll see each other sometimes," she sobbed.

"Surely, sometimes," said John steadily.

As he stood watching her walk along the road, he wondered how he was to live through the long days before him. For every morning when he awoke, the first thought was Thyrza, and through the working hours a light had shone, because in the evenings, when the yoke of labour was lifted, he had often managed to meet her. He looked down at the box she had left in his hand; it seemed somehow like the crumb a prisoner has prepared for the mouse that is dead. Then he roused himself, and forgetting his night's watch, followed her along the road, for the mouse is more precious to the prisoner than whole flocks to the man of crowded pastures.

At last he reached the farm of Long Furlong, where Thyrza lived as help to the mistress. The front of the house was dark, but the yard was lighted by a gleam of firelight from the open kitchen door. As Darracott stood outside, the scent of the fuchsia bush that was growing over the wall of the garden mingled in dream-like fashion with the squeak of a fiddle that was being played in the kitchen. Gradually the magnetism of the tune drew him forward, till he stood looking through the half-open door.

In the light of the fire that leapt in ruddy flames on the white-washed walls there sat a lad leaning back in a Windsor chair, as he cuddled a fiddle to his clean-shaven chin. A brown spaniel with a bandaged paw lay warming its stomach in front of the fire, and two candles set high on the mantelpiece threw their light downward on the boy's face. As Darracott watched, the fiddling ceased, and presently through the room there cooed a bird-note, liquid as the thrill of a thrush and mellow as the fall of rain-drops on the leaves. It came from the pursed-up lips of the fiddler, whom Darracott recognised as Ambrose Velly, the only son of the farmer of Long Furlong.

Then the door behind the settle opened, and as Thyrza came in, Ambrose called to her—

"Come, Thyrza, dance. For the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to-night, and I can play."

Then, as he drew his bow with a backward swing of his head, the measure of a dance tune rippled from the fiddle. In the gallant pose of the lad's head, in the backward sweep of a solitary lock of hair from his forehead, there was a suggestion of those lawless winds of the fancy that blow from unseen depths at the call of the spirit of youth. The slight, yet muscular, frame of the player was a-taut with the nervous strain of elation. The keen, dancing eyes, sea-blue in the daytime, yet green with the light behind them, gleamed beneath the broad, domed forehead as he tilted his chin backwards and joined the notes of the violin with a sort of wordless song that bubbled from the depths of joy. It was simple playing in its way, and the tunes were improvised from snatches of old country song or fragments of opera melodies that the player had learnt by ear; in the spirit of the player there lived all the charm of it.

Opposite him, on the flags of the kitchen, Thyrza was dancing with half-closed eyes and a body that answered dreamily to the notes of the fiddle. She took as many shapes, it seemed, as the curving back of a wave that falls wind-driven, on the rocks. At one moment she was dancing as lightly as the mist that rises from a waterfall, at another, as gaily as the dewdrops that sparkle in the grass, and again, as slowly as the foot of age that walks death-ward. Her dancing was born of the joy and pain she could never describe in words, born, too, of the nomad spirit of her fathers; for she was one of the "Braunds of Bucks," the colony of dark, half-Spanish people, who work as ship-breakers along the coast and form a race alien to the native folk. She was wholly unconscious of anything but the sound that led her, now dreamy as the coo of a wood-dove, now sadly sweet, like the song a mother sings to her baby, now wild, like the flying pulses that rush to their delight. For when Ambrose Velly took up his fiddle, in the sound of it, to Thyrza, sang the things of creation, as clearly as in the very mating song.

To Darracott it seemed that the tapping of her heels was the beat of hob-nailed shoes that rattled on his heart. She was, in truth, dancing away his homely visions of the future; for vaguely he recognised that the zest of a life in which he could not even breathe was thrilling through the room where these two were so happy together. In the glory of it he felt his own sluggishness as a stubborn jade which no spur can rouse; with his halting speech and heavy tread, he seemed rusting as he watched—outside. For there he belonged, to the rough winds, the sea and the slow earth. Then, with a pang of distrust, he gazed again into the face of the youth who could thus turn Thyrza into a sleep-walker. As Darracott watched, he held the carved box tightly, yet even then, so carefully, that his great strength avoided crushing the thin sides of it. For he possessed the hands that can make minute models of full-rigged ships, fasten them delicately down and fit them into bottles, where they start into upright position with the pull of a piece of elastic.

Ambrose was now playing the old tune, "The Wind among the Barley," playing it with an intensity that thrilled with the warmth of things. As he played, he passed in fancy from one delight to another, from the rustling sweep of the bearded heads in the rush of the jolly wind to the lingering breath of cows in the lane; from the sigh of the breeze in the pines to the roar of the tides that tear at the cliffs. He had become a child of the wind; for the lilt of the tune sang in his heart as it was singing in Thyrza's, but with this difference, that in the dancer it provoked but the vague pleasure of a sensation that was instantly translated into movement, while in Ambrose himself it aroused pictures that harmonised with the ideas called up by the book he had been reading.

For he was just awaking to the dearest delight of the old earth, the sweet savour of human life that is wrapt up in the books men write, the songs they make, and the pictures they paint. For the first time in his life he had made out a passage in French by himself, in old French, too, par le splendeur Dex, and life had given him a new key to its wonder world. Joy ! Joy ! Joy ! sang his heart, from brain to nerve, from nerve to fiddle-strings. It was old Villon's confession that rang in young Velly's head—

> Hé Dieu ! Se j'eusse estudié
> Au tems de ma jeunesse folle,
> Et à bonnes moeurs dédié,
> J'eusse maison et couche molle !

"Ma jeunesse folle," he repeated under his breath. There ought to have been "pretty maids all of a row" to dance in front of him; there ought to have been vineyards and olive-yards outside, instead of dun fields and grey sea. But the player cared not, in the joy of the artist nerves that thrilled to his finger-tips.

On the table lay the book that had wrought this witchery, a history of French literature that he had been devouring with a fastidious haste that rejected solid facts in the pleasure of fine phrases, even at times in the joy of mere names full of the sweetness of southern beauty. Maître François Rabelais; the very echoes of it gave visions, and over the soft syllables François Villon, he lingered like a lover over his mistress's little heart-name, relishing the taste of the old tavern rascal's human charm.

Suddenly a string snapped, and Ambrose laid his fiddle on the polished seat of the settle, while Thyrza sank down panting on the bench by the table, and laid her outstretched arms along it.

"Thyrza, Thyrza," cried Ambrose, "what the devil has got into us both to-night? But you can dance, I'll say that for you. And I can play a bit, too. Faith, I *can* play, and no mistake."

His delight in his own achievements was as naïve as the pleasure of a lamb when it first discovers the blissful power of tail-wagging to be a personal attribute.

"It does so make my heart beat," said Thyrza, "to hear you play. Something comes up, up, into my throat almost."

"Up, up," mocked Ambrose, giving three trills on muted strings; he could not bear to be long separated from his fiddle.

"You'm mazed, I do believe," laughed Thyrza, dimpling below the traces of tears that Darracott had noted round her eyes, but to which Ambrose remained entirely oblivious, "and if anybody else was to hear you, they'd think so too."

"Well, mother's upstairs. And she's often heard me before," said Ambrose, stretching out his legs to the fire in luxurious ease.

"There might be somebody else for all you know," said Thyrza in a small voice that trembled a little. "I don't believe I came home alone to-night from the Church decorating."

But if she wanted to arouse her hearer's jealousy, her attempt was quite unavailing, for Ambrose merely stretched out his hand to the table for his book, saying—

"There now, let me get on with this, there's a good girl. I have piped unto you and you have danced. That, Thyrza, ought to be enough for any reasonable woman. You're a nice little thing in your way, but you're a terrible waste of time to a busy man."

With a laugh he looked over his shoulder at her, as she shook a plump fist at him in anger that was half-feigned, half-real. For underneath the teasing tone she divined an indifference to her that was, womanlike, infinitely more alluring than Darracott's devotion.

"By Jove," said Ambrose, "you are a pretty piece, too. Come over and give us a peck, child."

Thyrza Braund had the beauty of the dawn; her tawny hair still retained the soft growth of a baby's, her lips the kissable quality of a child's. Her large eyes alone, under their full curved lids, were womanlike. The whole face had the appearance of a bow, even to the upward-springing dents at the corners of the lips and the tip-tilted chin and nose. The full curves of bosom and arms had the exuberance of a ripening peach.

At the mocking words her lips began to tremble, and a spasm of childish anger convulsed her face. She was accustomed to be teased by Ambrose, but to-night her nerves had been shaken by her pity for Darracott.

"You'm hard on me, Ambrose," she protested; "and I always do everything you ask. There's nobody on earth so unkind to me as you. And there's folks that like me very much, too."

The idea of her wonderful secret burnt in her heart for utterance, but her lips were sealed by the thought of how the big man had trembled. Darracott's love was the first secret she had ever kept to herself, but his reverent gentleness towards her called up an answering instinct of reserve to match his fine simplicity.

"You're a proper spitfire," said Ambrose. "Why, I believe you'd like to beat me this minute."

"I hate you, I hate you!" she sobbed, flinging herself out of the room in a whirl of petticoats, with the echoes of Ambrose's laugh ringing in her ears.

When the door banged behind Thyrza, Darracott drew a deep breath of relief, as though an unbearable pressure had been removed from his heart. For this slow man had read the secret of her slavish dependence on a lad's caprice, and with the painful foresight of love was able to view the scene in the light of the future, as well as of the present. To him this play-acting was diabolic possession, and Thyrza, no girl on the verge of love, but an automaton swayed by the will of a lad, unschooled by experience, ignorant even of the nature of his own feelings.

As Darracott returned home, he recognised his own powerlessness to help Thyrza in any way. He knew her to be fatherless, of a wildish stock. She was, it is true, a distant cousin of Mrs. Velly, and more in the position of friend than servant. Yet, even while he cursed the baseness of his own imagination, he saw, in a series of pictures, the ever-recurring possibilities of harm to the child in her nearness to the youth who could draw her as the moon draws the tides. Like all men who have lived natural lives, Darracott was very reverent to womanhood, but in the thought of her own recklessness, he wiped away the sweat from his forehead. Self-pity is to a man what weeping is to a woman, a safety-valve, but in strong hearts like Darracott's there is no room for that gentle relief. In these minutes he made a long journey, back along the road that his race had travelled, to the primitive savage that lurks in every man. He wanted to press the mocking light out of the lad's eyes, to feel the starting veins under his thumb. For in the exaggeration of jealousy Darracott felt that such dancing as this was a subtle shame to womanhood. Then the momentary impulse passed into a panic-stricken hurrying to-and-fro of his thoughts in the search for help, for he felt like a chained man watching a woman drown.

The moon riding high above the clouds lighted up the coast, flashing into the black chasms of the bays and outlining the dark shadow of the rocket-house. Over the Atlantic the light from Hartland Point pulsed out, alternately white and red. But by now Darracott had forgotten the storm, had forgotten his night's watch in the intense weariness that follows passion. Great weights fell on his eyelids, so that he could scarcely stagger down the cliff path, and chains seemed to hold back his limbs; for to his quiet mind had come the reaction that follows on excitement. Virtually he was sleep-walking, and when at last his own door was reached, he flung it open, and throwing himself with his arms across the table, fell into the deep sleep that nothing can resist.

CHAPTER II

LITTLE EGYPT

THE firelight and candlelight by which Ambrose Velly was trying to read soon made his eyes ache, and flinging aside the history of French literature, he lay back in his chair, resting his head on his clasped hands. The air was full of the scent of burning wood, which came from four large branches that had been thrust lengthwise into the fire. That stove was one of Mrs. Velly's trials, for in the downgrade of the family fortunes the rent of the farm had been unpaid for some years, and she had never dared to ask the landlord for a new one. Hence, Long Furlong still retained the old-fashioned oven called a Bodley, from the name of the Exeter manufacturer who invented the first stove with fountain and oven on either side.

Down the long kitchen, where the remains of fine plaster work were still to be found on one wall, there hung from the rafters of black oak tufts of feverfew and wormwood, the first a cattle drench, the second a tonic, and both monuments testifying to Mrs. Velly's thrift. It was a standing cause of dispute that Ambrose had refused to swallow the wormwood decoction ever since he read that it grows mainly in old churchyards, where it was first planted in order that the church floors might be sprinkled with it at certain seasons.

The thoughts that flitted through Ambrose's head as he sat before the fire were by no means concerned with Thyrza, who was very much like his fiddle to him, an instrument on which he could play whenever he was seized with the desire to do so. His mind had reverted to the wonderful moment, several years before, in which there had been born the real passion of his life. We keep no registers of mental births, we men who chronicle so carefully the events of the flesh, yet a wiser race than ours would mark the first faint flickerings of those wandering gleams that herald the birth of a mental passion in a human soul. Out of the East, or out of the West, tempest-driven, or carried by the softest breeze, they come, the finer intuitions whence spring those visions of inborn powers, afterwards to be incarnated in word or colour, stone or sound.

Ambrose could see himself sitting at that very table by his side, opening the book with fine plates of French cathedrals that the vicar had lent him. As he turned over the pages, he had come suddenly upon the phrase "flying buttress," which struck him as so curious that he turned back to find the meaning of the expression. Whilst he read, all the cravings after beauty that had vaguely possessed him from childhood began to crystallise into definite desire. His education at the parish school had only revealed tantalising glimpses of the world of letters, but here, in this work on architecture, something burnt for him like the fire which brings out the secret writing of a cipher, the cipher of his own nature. He began to long for instant possession of books on "figures," books of applied mathematics, so that he, too, might grapple with the question of strain in buildings. For he read how the architects of the Middle Ages tried to solve the difficulty of weight-bearing in their edifices by exterior buttresses exposed to the weather, so that if these failed the whole building collapsed, and how the mistake of one school was repeated generation after generation, because of the lack of mathematical knowledge. In a fever he turned the pages to see if there were any guides here to the hidden parts of the mystery. But there were none, only a fact which explained what had often puzzled him, that the names of the architects of churches are usually unknown. Learning that this was because they were ecclesiastics, whose order absorbed the honour of their achievements, he decided that when his cathedral was built, the name of the architect should be blazoned abroad. The next moment he saw his folly and laughed at such thoughts in a lad who had no art knowledge, no mathematical training, and no possibilities of such.

He had travelled a long way since that night, for he had just now come back from a three years' course of training with a country architect, a friend of his mother's, who had taken him for a smaller premium than would have been accepted with another pupil. In a measure he had, then, already entered the kingdom of promise that had looked so far away on the evening when he first made the acquaintance of a flying buttress.

Yet he was full of an undercurrent of vexation at the shackling power of the circumstances that still remained to be mastered. The sensation made him restless, so that he got up and went to see to the stables and their occupants. When he returned to the house he found that Thyrza had lit the lamp and was now busy with the preparations for supper.

"Old Caleb's daughter has come home unexpected to-night," she remarked, with recovered composure. "She'll be over to see the missus bime-by, I reckon."

Caleb Vinnicombe was the one labourer now employed at the farm, and his cottage across the road was a swarming nest of children, the offspring of a second marriage. There was a long scraping sound as Thyrza drew out the table for supper and threw a coarse tablecloth over one end. Just at that moment the door from the house into the kitchen opened, and Ambrose jumped up as his mother appeared round the corner of the settle.

It was a fine, almost Roman head, that of Mrs. Velly, with white hair that had once been wiry black, drawn back from broad, straight brows. The contours of the features had been refined till they stood out like chiselled ivory, but in the brown eyes alone there still burnt the fire of life that age and trouble had driven from the rest of her face. These could still flash with rage and laughter, still melt with tenderness as they had done years ago.

Behind Mrs. Velly there stood a blowsy country-wench, her hard, red cheeks and hands flaming like purple porcelain.

"Why, Mrs. Lapthorne," cried Thyrza, coming up to shake hands with the girl, "what a stranger, to be sure!"

"It's old Caleb's daughter," whispered Mrs. Velly to Ambrose, as she bustled about the preparations for a meal.

"Why, Thyrza, my dear life," said the visitor, throwing back her beaded cape and revealing her broad bust decorated with a whole cluster of pins stuck in the bosom of her dress, "you'm behindhand; I buried Lapthorne two years agone, and now I'm Mrs. Rosevear."

"Never!" chimed in Mrs. Velly, bringing out the great cheese-dish. "And you not twenty-four!"

Mrs. Rosevear flashed her row of perfect teeth in a wide smile that showed the great joy of triumph.

"Why, however do 'ee compass it?" asked Thyrza. "Here be I that haven't got one man, and on a farm and all; and here be you with two. 'Tisn't looks and 'tisn't money that done it, neither," she added, with true country frankness.

Ambrose laughed outright, while Mrs. Velly looked at him with a motherly pride in seeing him happy.

"Thyrza, Thyrza," she interposed, "now you behave yourself."

But Mrs. Rosevear was in no way offended.

"No," she said triumphantly, "'tisn't looks and 'tisn't money that draws the men. 'Tis the 'Come hither' in the eye. That's what 'tis, the 'Come hither' in the eye."

"But how's a body to get it, Mrs. Rosevear, so to call 'ee what you lawful are?" said Thyrza, handing the guest the cup of tea that graces every feast in the West. "Was 'ee always gifted that way, my dear?"

"Not me," said Mrs. Rosevear frankly, pouring the tea into the saucer to cool it. "Men be like sheep, let one lead, t'others follow, and then you can easy slip the noose on the one you fancies."

"But 'tis the getting of the first one that gallies (bothers) a maid," interposed Mrs. Velly, while Thyrza nodded her head in sad acquiescence.

"Tchuh, tchuh, missus," said Mrs. Rosevear, "and what's wits been given to a woman for, I should like to know, except to compass the management o' man. Now, just you let me tell a bit," she continued, putting down her cup and squaring her determined shoulders in the heat of narrative.

"I'd a deal of bother with Lapthorne first-long. Us was to have been married of a Saturday up to Plymouth, where I'd been living a good bit then, and Lapthorne was to come up there, him being a Holsworthy man. Now, if you'll believe me, on the Thursday afore that Saturday he was heard to say as he didn't know as he'd be able to find time to come up to Plymouth a-Saturday."

"A pretty fantod (fuss) you must ha' been in," breathed Thyrza sympathetically.

"But," said Mrs. Rosevear, lifting an impressive forefinger, "do you think I give him up for that? Not me.

I took and packed up and back to Holsworthy again, and there I plumped down afore his mother's cottage and said I'd come to stay. I filled the whole of their front room with boxes and that. And in that front room they found I was going to bide. Us lived like that for the better part of a week, and at meals I didn't spare the victuals neither. Then, thinks I, 'tis getting on for the new year, and us'll have to be called home again in church if I don't make sure of Lapthorne afore then. And that'll be a double expense. I must borrow Sam."

"Borrow Sam!" echoed Thyrza faintly, as Mrs. Rosevear's greatness became apparent. She was standing with wide-open, round eyes in front of the visitor, while Ambrose and Mrs. Velly watched the two from the table.

"Iss, fay, that's my brother-law up to Plymouth; only Lapthorne and they didn't know 'en, never having been to see us to Plymouth."

"Whatever good was he to 'ee?"

"'Tis in these little ways, my dear, that you can tell what a woman's made of. Why, of a Sunday morning Sam came along to Holsworthy and took me out, same as if 'twas courting he'd come for; arm-in-crook out and clipsed round the waist back. Did the thing proper, did Sam, though I'd always thought 'en slack-baked afore. But then, anybody'd be slack-baked after living with my sister Selina."

"And Lapthorne?" asked Ambrose.

"Went to church New Year's Eve like a lamb, with a carriage and pair and two bottles of port, and wanted to knock Sam into the middle of the road for a bouldacious chap. A proper wedding, it was, with dancing till seven the next morning. And no more trouble with Lapthorne; noosed he was, and knowed it."

"Fine, I call it," chuckled Thyrza.

"But the finest thing was that I'd got over his old mother, who says to me, 'It's all very well for you, coming down and talking about a wedding. How can us be put to the bother of a wedding, with the cow due to calve?'"

"And," continued Mrs. Rosevear, after a pause, "Lapthorne didn't do so bad for hissel, neither; for when he lay a-dying, he says, 'We've got on very well together. It's a pity I've got to go, wife, isn't it?' But it struck innerds, and so he'd to go—out over bar. The year afore that I'd buried my little maid. I've got the penny some one gave her a week afore her died, set in a fret-work cross."

There was a sympathetic silence in the room.

"Her dad made the cross," said Mrs. Rosevear gently; "us thought the more of her, there being but the one. But there—'A hot May makes a fat church hay.' Diphthery, it was, in a mortal hot spring. And being wisht without 'em I took up with Rosevear, over to Bradworthy."

"I know," said Ambrose; "John Rosevear, oldish and a stuggy (stout and short) sort of a chap."

"Stuggy or no, Master Ambrose," said Mrs. Rosevear, fiercely, "he earns a full meal for hisself and me most days. And in my house, let me tell 'ee, I'm missus."

Mrs. Rosevear's temper was rising, for Mrs. Velly was not over much of a mistress in her own house, according to the generally accepted opinion.

"The very first morning after we'd been to church, I says to Rosevear, 'Pluck that fowl.' ''Tis plucked already,' says he. And so it was plucked, though it had slipped my mind—all but the wing-feathers that I'd trussed. Then said I, 'Pluck every feather off the wings, for if I say "Pluck," plucked it shall be.'" Mrs. Rosevear spread out her knees, and planted her firm hands on them, as she gazed round at her audience.

"And plucked it was," she continued, "though there never was such a sight as that fowl without any wing-feathers. Us had to eat 'en ourselves, for I couldn't send 'en to market like that. But I'd never no more trouble with Rosevear, and what's an old hen to a man that knows he'd better look alive when his missus bids 'en?"

"A poor soft head, he must be," sniffed Thyrza, with head in air. She adored Mrs. Velly, and intended to pay back the slight about a woman who is mistress in her own house. "Nooses and nets, indeed, I wonder you bain't 'shamed to sit there, telling up such old trade."

Mrs. Rosevear sat aghast at the minx; then she turned to Mrs. Velly, with a wink, and began to hum—

"A sweet pretty maiden sat under a tree,
She sighed and said, Would that I married might be."

" 'Tis a poor tale," she concluded, turning again towards Thyrza, "for a woman that can't get a man. And your cheeks be beginning to fall in, too."

The air Mrs. Rosevear left behind her in the room was decidedly electric.

"Never mind, Thyrza," said Mrs. Velly, "she's only teasing you, my dear."

But two round tears rolled down Thyrza's cheek, showing the fine grain of her skin as they trickled across it.

"Fallen in, indeed," chuckled Ambrose. "Let's have a look at 'em," he said, coming near and placing a hand under her chin.

But that was too much, and with a jerk Thyrza fled from him and rushed upstairs again.

"Where's father?" said Ambrose, drawing a three-legged stool up by the side of his mother's chair.

"In bed, my dear."

There was a sigh of relief from both, for it was always pleasanter when Mr. Velly had retired.

"Lad, what's bothering you to-night?" said Mrs. Velly, softly putting a hand on her son's shoulder. She had extinguished the light, and the smouldering firelight flickered on the fronts of her knitting needles. She knitted in the old country fashion, pushing her needles against two corks that were slung round her waist.

"How did you know, mother?" asked Ambrose, looking up in surprise.

"My dear, if mothers don't see things, who will?"

"I got to thinking, I suppose."

"About what?" said Mrs. Velly, putting her knitting on the settle and watching the bright head of her son.

"Of how before you're born everything is settled for 'ee. You're set down in a place and there you have to bide, even if it isn't what you want to do. Here am I, back again, and set down to farm work once more. My three years' training thrown away, and all the struggle you had to get it for me wasted. 'To plough and mow, and reap and sow, and be a farmer's boy.' That's the size of life for me," he said bitterly.

"Well," said Mrs. Velly, "you know it wasn't any one but yourself that threw up the work in Cornwall to come home here. Why did you do it, if you didn't mean it?"

"Mother, it's not fair of you to say that. You know there wasn't money enough for me to stay away longer, or to pay another premium. And," he added in a low voice, "I couldn't leave you any longer with no one to help you with the work and with father."

"Ambrose," said Mrs. Velly, "I didn't want you to leave, as you know. I've always been a fighter, and fight I shall to the very end. I'd have strained somehow to get you more teaching, I would, indeed. But you acted so hasty. And now, my dear, perhaps it'll only be a short time longer that you're wanted here. He's going down very fast, much faster these last months than ever before.

Don't give way. Work all you can, and hope. I'll see you a great man yet, maybe."

"Why didn't you leave father years ago?" said Ambrose with uncompromising directness. "I heard a man say to-day, 'Ay, Velly, he's going down, sure 'nuff.' He goes and drinks away every penny of ready money, and we're two years behind in the rent."

Mrs. Velly drew a quick breath, as the old do before the daring lawlessness of young thought, that recks nothing of the close ties of habit and ancient obligation.

"He's treated 'ee badly enough," Ambrose continued. "Long Furlong used to be called Little Egypt, Caleb told me the other day; because, as he said, 'There was a mort of victuals of every sort upon it.' There isn't now, and that's what he meant, of course."

"Well?" asked Mrs. Velly in a hard voice; there was more to come, as she knew.

"And I'm tied to a plough handle and with nothing to show for it, that's the worst of it. I can't even have sixpence for a box of pencils. Why on earth you should stick to him I don't know. It isn't as if it was any good, either."

"Ambrose, I want to show you something, something you've never heard tell of before," said Mrs. Velly, with a laugh that had the quiver of tears in it.

Lighting a candle she led him down the passage to the best room with its album-crowded table and ancient piano. In the dark corner behind the door was a carved oak chest, which Ambrose now remembered that he had never seen open. Placing her candle on the ground and taking a key from her pocket, Mrs. Velly knelt down, turned the key in the lock and raised the lid. Then she lifted the candlestick and held it over the dark interior of the chest. Ambrose exclaimed and suddenly knelt by his mother's side. The oak case looked like a tomb, for hidden in the shadows of it lay a white baby figure. As he stooped closer he saw that it was carved in marble, with tiny hands crossed over its bare breast, above the curving limbs of infantile loveliness.

"Mother, what is it?" he cried, putting both his arms round her. As she felt the touch of his hard young body she quivered, for to every woman, even to one who has borne a man child, the half-known power of the body of man, the life-bringer, is strange, mysterious, compelling.

"That's my baby girl Janie. She died when a sculptor lodged here with us one summer. He asked if he might make a model of her, and he did. Then, months after, when he'd gone back to London, he sent me this. She was born long afore I had you, cheeld. I'll tell 'ee all I can."

"Don't, if it hurts you. Don't, mother!" He could feel her heavy, painful breathing against his side.

"I must, Ambrose. It'll tell what I want 'ee to know. Janie come to us, to father and me, after we'd been married a year."

Ambrose nodded, his passionate eyes fixed on his mother's face, as they both crouched by the side of the child's casket.

"But she wasn't born right," said Mrs. Velly at last, "not as she ought to ha' been, not as she is there in the old ancient chest."

The good, fair whiteness of the child's body gleamed almost luminously from the shadowy corner.

"Your father wasn't steady one night when he took me out in a boat, and in getting out I had a fall, and Janie was born, only a seven months' child, with her little feet all crushed. She never would have walked, Ambrose."

"And father?"

"He never looked but once at her. He cursed himself, and—I hated him. I never let 'en come near me, as a wife should, not for years." Mrs. Velly knelt, leaning over the side of the chest to avoid her son's eyes.

"Don't go on, mother. Why should you tell me this?"

"I must, for you won't understand else. And then he went away from me—not in one way, for he bided most times home here, for all that folks could tell. But I wasn't a wife to 'en all those years. I sent 'en away—to others, and so he went down. I did it, Ambrose."

"No, no, mother," said Ambrose, getting up and moving restlessly about the room. The strong, alert woman of every day seemed pleading with her son.

"Yes, I did. And when I found out what he'd come to, I had you, sonny."

"Why do you tell me this?" said Ambrose fiercely. "Why should I know? And it's been agony for you to tell me. Whatever you've done, he's paid back, God knows."

"This is why. I drove 'en down, because I'd a heart that wouldn't forgive; for it was he that I had waited for, trembling as a maid will when she waits in the dimpsy for her man. He was the man that gave me the chillern that lay on my breast; he was the man that loved me—ay, and loves me still, for all I've had—blows."

"No, mother!"

"Iss, child; but he's the thing that makes me and keeps me a woman with a heart in my breast, not a stone. He'd be life to me down in hell. That's why women like me don't leave their men."

"Mother, I'll help 'ee. I'll never be the least of a burden to 'ee again. I'll keep things going; I'll chuck my darned pencils out to sea. I'll work harder than I ever have afore."

"Eh, lad," she said, clasping him with a laugh and a shake as he knelt beside her again. "Do you think 'twas for that I ripped up my life for 'ee to look into? Young things be like turkeys—a rare trouble to hatch, regular churchyard for worriting deaths, and little profit when they come to market. It's this, lad," she said, drawing him up to her shoulder, "you're a man now, and this man's body that I bore has a man's passions. There's things that a lad doesn't talk to his mother about, and so she must talk to him as well as she can. Mind, boy, when your members will hardly obey 'ee, that you'm making or marring, not your own life, but a maiden's, and many more than one maiden's, belike. 'Tis two souls and two lives that's held in your straining arms and lives on and on, for ages and ages, maybe; and pain or sorrow or peace and blessing waiting for 'ee at the end of the lane. Eh, lad, God keep 'ee and bless 'ee and guide 'ee!"

She held him for a moment and then watched him stumble half-blindly out of the room, all the vivid fire of the bliss and agony of the bygone years flashing from her eyes. Then she shivered, and drew the grey, three-cornered shawl closer over her tired body.

Still, she had misunderstood the meaning of her boy's perplexity. Being a woman she saw mainly the passionate side of life, the power that lights the hearth-fire and fills the cradle or—devastates and wrecks and ruins.

CHAPTER III

ARMIGER

SUDDENLY Darracott awoke, and sitting up stretched the cramp from his stiffened limbs. From the glimmering window-square came a faint light, which at first he took to be that of the evening dimness, till in one blinding shock he remembered last night and his neglected watch. Yet in the same moment came the frenzied attempt to flee from consequences that follows hard on error; so often he had watched uselessly that this night, of all nights, there could have been no signals from the sea. Then, praying madly that whatever had happened during the past night might be as though it had not been, praying that the destiny which had, like all destiny, flowed over him from behind, might be reversed, he opened the door and went out. Walking along the cliffs he strained his eyes under the penthouse of his outstretched palm, while the sun rose.

Beyond the glittering channel of the Severn Sea the Welsh shores lay drawn in shadowy lines of silver-grey. Lundy was but a faint blue cloud when seen from the uplands where the sunlight was beginning to flash on the burnished barley fields and to blaze on the black cliffs, tree-veiled on their slopes or heather-crowned in purple. Away to the right, with its head in a veil of mist, stood Hartland Point. Seawards the misty curtains, called the pride of the morning, were lifting, while the sunlight pierced through them here and there, kindling the sea into laughing discs of quivering gold.

Each wave that broke on the rocks below was a wonder, for the wind, now blowing steadily off the land, caught the spray ere the wave broke, and blew it backwards in silvery foam across the translucent emerald behind. Wave after wave was thus caught, tossed backward, and turned into a glory of sight and sound. The sea and the wind were at play in the shimmer of mist and sunshine; in the roar of the incoming tide that mingled with the laughing fall of spray; in the splash of foam on the shark's-tooth rocks beneath the encircling cliffs. Never a moment's pause was there in the mighty diapason of sound, never a moment of sameness in the shifting of sunshine and shadow.

Then, as Darracott reached the cliff called Damehole, he saw what, after all, he had always expected to see—wreckage. Heaving at the edge of the tide was a mass of spars, the broken fragments of a ship's fittings, mingled with bedding. No derelict was visible, though at low tide her masts would probably rise above the water-line.

After this, Darracott knew he could never be the same man again; for being one of the older volunteers at the life-saving station, no watch had been kept on him to see that he performed his duty. In the first moment his mind reconstructed the scene of the tragedy, the dragging anchors, the flares sent up again and again, without answer from the shore where their own kin slept as peacefully as the sea-mews. Yet he found that at the coastguard look-out, where two men had been at watch all night, not a light had been seen.

"But from here," said the spruce young boatman in charge, "she couldn't have been seen signalling; for if she went ashore on Smoothlands she was never within sighting range of the point. At Quay her lights would have been seen. Who was there?"

"I was; and I never seed a light of any sort, beyond the ordinary."

"Yet 'twasn't a thick night, neither."

"There wasn't any signal to be seen from there. If there had been, I couldn't have missed it; of that I'll take my oath," persisted Darracott.

Had he been more in the habit of shirking his duty, Darracott would have repeated his untruth far less firmly. But when all his world was crashing into atoms around him, the only hope of being able to exist at all lay in denial, and he clung to it as a drowning man to a spar; he would have clung to it in the face of actual disproof. But of this he knew there was no possibility, since his master, the farmer appointed by the Board of Trade to be answerable for the look-out, had doubtless relied so entirely on Darracott's trustworthy character that he had made no inspection. Almost worse than the lost lives was the thought of how he had failed in his trust.

In the course of the day there came ashore one body and a staved-in boat, with the name *Flying Foam* on it. Although no derelict had yet been seen, it was ascertained that she was a small Welsh coaler from Swansea, with five men aboard, whether ill-found with life-saving appliances and signalling apparatus could not be known until the inquest on the body of the sailor. It was expected that the other four would probably come ashore on the ninth day.

Darracott worked in the hours that followed with a vigour that was almost superhuman, trying instinctively to deaden his senses. There was something already of the furtive look of a hunted thing about his eyes, for he became aware that a rumour was spreading that he had not been at the rocket-house. Somehow the man carried an unmistakeable air of doubt about him—or so at least he himself fancied. But in the thought of his own trouble, his fears for Thyrza were heightened fiftyfold, and what had been before an ebullition of jealousy was now a steady purpose to drive

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him into precipitate and, therefore foolish, action. He had determined on an appeal to Ambrose Velly.

In the afternoon of the same day Ambrose had ridden over to the village of Sutcombe, there to make sketches and notes of some of the most remarkable wood-carving to be seen in any country church; for, as behoves a lover of Gothic architecture, he was vastly enamoured of the nervous, life-like studies of plants and animals to be found in mediæval stone and woodwork. For some time he had been making it a practice to visit whatever churches he could with portfolio and notebook; he was, like those of his generation, keeping alight the Lamp of Memory, in the hope that some day he would be able himself to light the Lamp of Power. With this end in view he had, indeed, worked many hours in a stone-carver's yard, only to be disgusted at the rule-of-thumb methods.

Within the church at Sutcombe there was a cool, whispering silence, for the ancient building seemed reverting from the hewn temple to the woodland shrine, from the later creed of sacrifice to the earlier one of nature worship. Emerald moss was creeping up the granite of the pillars, and the carved bench-ends were gnarled and eaten as if by the action of wind and rain. Against the window-panes green boughs rustled tidings of bird-haunted forest peace.

Through the open doorway there came the thrill of a humming monotone, that sounded like a droning incantation to some spirit of sunlight, or, maybe, some "Greek invocation to call fools into a circle." Practically it only meant that a human voice was being used as a tuning-fork, for after a few seconds came the burst of song that the humming had heralded.

See what love, like mighty oceans!
See what floods of mercy rise!
See Him now, the Prince of glory,
To redeem our life He dies!

The solemn minor thirds of men's voices came through the porch as from a tunnel. They were singing "Ebenezer," the hymn which has gathered into its melody, through long association, all the pain of loss and the hope of faith. The lad in the church doorway vibrated to the deep tones, for all his senses thrilled as easily to the breath of joy and pain as the leaves of an aspen to the shiver of the wind.

Then he frowned and hastily shut the door behind him, for the sounds meant that the choir excursion was probably on its way to inspect the church, and that his solitude would be disturbed. He stood for a moment listening, till the hymn changed into the shouts that accompany the course of a group of young men and boys through nutty hedges, with festoons of honeysuckle to be pulled for the grasping. As he waited, Ambrose Velly's face cleared, for he heard them passing down the lane to the side of the church.

It was with a stealthy, almost furtive, air that he tip-toed silently up the aisle in the manner of one approaching something infinitely precious. Finally, at the altar rails, he knelt, for in this place of woodland shadows, even at midday, the light was dim. He began to pass his hands lovingly over the carved woodwork, as a blind man touches a well-loved face. That was not enough; ultimately he lit a match to see better into those hidden corners where the old workers often put their most loving toil. It was, indeed, an exquisite thing before which Ambrose knelt, being all that remains of a carved wooden screen that, for perfection of design and craftsmanship, must have been of old one of the glories of North Devon, the land of wood carvers.

Outside the church the glittering haze of late summer brooded over the lanes, now gorgeous with the purple and gold of the August flowers, that from the hedges cast the dust of pollen and the scent of lush growth in all directions. Butterflies and moths of all species, from the homely meadow-brown and cabbage white to the splendid peacock and the silvery fritillary, poised and fluttered above the wild scented tangle. As he gazed and touched, the lanes outside came back to the lad, just as, centuries ago, they must have been present to the eye of the designer of these panels. For here was twining ivy, bold hemp agrimony, whose fluff of pollen had flown against his face half an hour before, and wild maiden-hair fern, that clings to the barrenest walls of this land. It was a revelation in design to Ambrose, and he drew a breath of satisfaction as he realised how the skilled worker thinks the thoughts of the great artificer, nature, over again, for the glory of his own handiwork.

The boy had been but a few minutes bending over his drawing-board, for he was beginning a sketch of the panels, when the door of the church burst open with a crash that startled the artist, who jumped to his feet at the noise. The great figure that advanced up the aisle was rumbling out quaint sounds that echoed eerily, exotically, up the little church, as it hummed the rollicking music of "Oberon in Fairy Land"—

We eat their cakes and sip their wine;
Oh, then, what sport! The wine runs short,
The blushing cheeks with anger glow;
Their cakes they miss, and shriek, "Who's this?"
We answer nought but ho! ho! ho!

"Naught but ho, ho, ho!" repeated Dr. Cleopas Dayman, his leathery lips playing in the mobile fashion of a baby's. He was a huge man, big-boned and heavy, with a broad paunch that he loved to cover with resplendent waistcoats, and a wide face that glowed in its setting of silvery hair like the polished pink lip of a great sea shell. He was a skilful rider, otherwise the two stout roadsters who carried him to his patients would never have been able for their work. In a house he always plunged straight for the nearest chair, sofa, bed, or bench; out-of-doors he was always seen mounted on a great horse. Dr. Dayman, in fact, sat through life, and "as tall as Dr. Dayman's horse" had become as common as the familiar phrase in these parts, "as dark as a Welcombe woman."

With wide-awake hat pushed far back, and great legs a-straddle, he marched up the aisle.

"Hullo, boy," he cried, desisting from Oberon, "what are you up to here? Hum, hum, not so bad," he said, inspecting the drawing. "So," continued he, dropping heavily on the cushioned seat of a pew, "you're back again. And I hear you like the building trade fine. Well, it's a bit hard on you. But—

There's many a dark and cloudy morning
Turns out to be a sunshiny day.

And there's one sure thing in this life that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a strong desire finds a way. You'll get back to your work somehow, I'll take my oath. You like it, don't you?"

"Like it," burst out Ambrose, "why it's the very King of arts!"

"So it is, boy, so it is. A great architect is the master-artist, for he has to make every one of the arts serve him."

"My old master used to say that the ideal architect must study everything; form, even the human, for that is the most perfect; emotion, to know the most noble; matter, for in that he works; colour, for by light and shade he must express what the universe means to him. That's what he told me once."

"Ay," said Dr. Dayman, bending shaggy brows at the youth who stood in front of him, "you'd give your eye-tooth to be a great artist, I see. A lusty chap, too, and lusty when you were dropped, as I remember perfectly."

The doctor laughed, recalling the spirit of prophecy that had come upon him, when he had ushered the boy into the world. He remembered now his own words, spoken as he handled the little body and tested the pliant members with his great finger and thumb.

"Dammy," said he, "this lad's made for the joys of earth. For the joys of earth, or nobody ever was. He'll suck the sweetness out of a posy or two, I'll go bail."

"Just you believe in yourself and your own desire," he said, "and you'll get back to the work you love. Argent, a chevron between three castles or," he continued meditatively. "It's bad heraldry, but do you know what it is?"

"It's the Velly arms," said Ambrose.

"Spurious, of course," said Dr. Dayman, "but after a fashion, I suppose you can call yourself Armiger. And none the better for that, mind you. You're none the more likely to succeed for having the blood of the petty squirearchy in your veins. What was your mother's name?"

Dr. Dayman was great on breed in men and strains in horses.

"Dark, De Arc, I've heard say. Weavers and smiths, I believe," said Ambrose.

"That's better, that's better. Huguenots, that'll be. You might get the fine artist hand that way."

"But it says the Velly family are extinct on the monument at Hartland."

"Oh, a collateral line, yours, perhaps. But what's brought you over here as far as Sutcombe? It's a good ride from Long Furlong. I saw your horse tied up outside, so I came in to see what you were about."

Ambrose grinned, for the doctor's curiosity was as insatiable as a child's.

"I wanted to draw these panels. They're so fine," he said, touching them lovingly. "There's the plant that is growing outside."

"Ay, hemp agrimony. Carved here by hands that are long since dead," said Dr. Dayman, who under his rough exterior was a man of fine taste and cultured instincts.

"That's the wonderful part of it," Ambrose blurted out. "But the earth's the oldest, after all. I thought of that t'other day when I kicked a clod to pieces. It's a deal older than this oak-work, and yet we like this because it's so precious old, but we never think of the earth being old."

His cheeks flushed and his hands trembled. Like a virgin at the door of the temple of life, Ambrose felt himself drawing the curtain of the world of thought, that world of infinite renunciation and lasting peace.

"Hullo, hullo," said Dr. Dayman. "What's this? Can 'ee think then, lad?"

But Ambrose had become sheepish again. He wanted to talk of the interest of design, of the wave-forms he had found in stone-work, but he dared not begin, partly from shyness, and partly from that inability to marshal his ideas which is the bane of the slow-moving country mind.

"Well," said the doctor, seeing that no answer was forthcoming, "it's the human being who put brain and heart into his work that interests us in old work, I reckon. The man that wrought it is in this oak-work. That's why we love it more than the clod of earth."

Ambrose sighed with the satisfaction of solution, as they began to walk round the church.

"But," said Ambrose, "what troubles me is how we've lost the power of putting ourselves into our work. That's just what we can't do. Look how crisp that leafage is," he said, pointing to a carved bench-end. "All we can do is to copy, and lifelessly at that."

"We've eaten of the tree of knowledge, boy," said

Dr. Dayman; "they were eating of the tree of life. They were children carving because they loved to do it; but we are learned archæologists, who know everything about the angel fashions in dress of the fourteenth century—and nothing about angels as they are to-day."

"We can never become children again, I suppose," said Ambrose sadly.

"No; we've got to become men. When we can love beauty as a man loves, we shall have the beautiful, manlike things that only a man *can* make. But there! the Sublime and Beautiful isn't my province."

As a matter of fact, as Macaulay said of Horace Walpole, Dr. Dayman's department was rather the Odd; he loved a collection of toby jugs infinitely more than the dusky shadows of cathedral arches, if the truth must be told.

"And," said he, pointing to the fine bench-ends of carved oak, "there's a deal more of humanity than that of the craftsman in a place like this; for where the artificers gave skill, the gentle family gave wealth. There you have the arms of the Prideaux and Granville families, and the Communion Service was given by the Prideaux ancestors. The whole place is writ over with the men of the past. You want, as they did, to write your name in stone. Isn't it so?"

Ambrose nodded.

"I'll tell you something," said Dr. Dayman as they stood in the porch. "When I was a lad I wanted to be a painter, but when my father drove me to it I became a sawbones, and felt like a Michael Angelo studying form whenever I handled a leg-bone. Lord! what a fool I was. But do you know where the folly came in?"

"No," said Ambrose.

"In not sticking to what I loved," said he, emphasising his point with a dig in Ambrose's ribs. "'Go back to your gallipots, John Keats,' said they. And I was fool enough to go. Don't you stick to your furrows too long. But they'll teach you what you won't learn from any one else. What's outside there?" he said, pointing to the horizon.

"Sky and moor and fields and sea," said Ambrose.

"Sky and moor and fields and sea," repeated the doctor. "Just so. And let them be your masters for the time."

The two stood looking at the mossy tombstones outside.

"Come over," said the doctor, "to Hartland, and see me some evening. I've some new pictures to show you. And you haven't been to see the Westaways yet. Why not?" he said, looking keenly in the lad's face.

Mr. Westaway was the Vicar of Hartland, and from him had come the book on architecture that had carried all Ambrose Velly's longings into one channel.

"I couldn't," he answered, looking away. "You see, it was they who put me on the path like, and now I've turned back. It seems ungrateful, but father forced it on me."

"Ay, I see. Full of high-falutin', as a lad should be. Well, Ambrose, you're a nice boy, and I wouldn't say but what you'll be a fine man, some day. You'll drop some of the high-falutin' on the way, but you're the better for it now. Only, I'd go and see the Westaways, if I were you."

"Mr. Westaway gave me my first lessons in mathematics and Miss Damaris first showed me, in her night-class, what a fine picture means."

"Ay," said the doctor, "so she did. I wonder whether she was a fool to do it?"

"Princess Damaris, a fool!" exclaimed Ambrose.

"Well, for all she's Princess Damaris, yet she's a woman, and there's apt to be a strain of folly in 'em. And as for petticoats, just you keep clear of 'em, till you're my age," he shouted back, till in the curves of the lane his leit motif of Ho! ho! ho! was lost.

"The old buffoon," said Ambrose to himself. Yet he felt like a flower expanding its leaves in the sunshine; for, after all, it was delightful to be at home again, where a little court of admirers, including even this old free-talker, paid toll to his charm.

A few hours later Ambrose had left Sutcombe, buried in its mossy woodland behind him, and with Bradworthy on his right hand, was entering the wild, bleak corner of North Devon that is buttressed by the cliffs of Hartland, the Promontory of Hercules of the ancients.

Over Bursdon Moor the wind shivered from off the sea, whistling shrewdly through the stunted furze-bushes and stirring the tufts of bell-heather that grew along the low stone walls. The sunset light gleamed on the surface of the road that wound, like a trail of white ribbon, up one side of the hill and down the other. On either hand stretched the moor, reed-clad and furze-dotted, with vivid patches marking the "meshes" or "mires," perilous to the bullocks of the twelve farmers who share the grazing rights of the moor. Lundy Island, out beyond, lay stretched a purple mirage against the sunset bar of golden red that bounded the western horizon, dividing the silver of the sea from the angry dun colour of the sky, and turning the reeds at the edge of the moor into tendrils of waving soot against the flame of its line of fire.

Presently out of the purple swung a globe of golden light, swung for a moment and passed, like the visible sign of a watcher who slumbers not. It was but Lundy Light, yet in the midst of nature's sleep of hidden power, in the menace of the grey waters and the whistle of the chill wind, this puny sign of human forethought brought a quick catching of the breath; not so helpless after all the men who drag a living from the rock-bound shore, the salt cliff pastures, and the sedgy marshes inland.

It is a strange land, that corner of Devon through which he rode, a land that more than any other part of the west recalls the loneliness of the scenery suggested in the Book of Job. Bare-breasted to the starlight and sunshine lie the quaggy moorlands and half-regained fields, intersected by long white roads that wind past ancient farm-houses, built with cob walls many feet in thickness, each with the stone hepping-stock outside the door. All the westward roads diverge towards the headland that gazes seawards like a colossal fortress set against the raging of the Atlantic breakers.

In summer the air has a quality of intense purity that imparts an eastern brilliance to the stars. But over the cliffs, at all times of the year, the sea-mist may come in great waves, blotting out farm after farm in a curtain of silvery foam, that covers the thatch with a gem-like moisture and encourages the growth of lichen on the slate-roofs and of clinging ferns in every cranny. A land it is where nature visibly weaves the garment by which we know her, a land where, in turns, the winds hurtle, the sea-fog creeps, the stars gleam and the sun burns.

As Ambrose turned the corner of the lane that leads to Long Furlong, he could see the light thrown across the road in a long ray from the open door of Vinnicombe's cottage. In the brightness of it, he could also discern a man's figure leaning against the wall of the farm-garden, apparently waiting there for some one. As he drew near he recognised the hero of the day's excitement, the labourer supposed to have been on the look-out at Hartland Quay.

The cheeping voices of children, like the cries of tiny birds, issued from the tightly-shuttered cottage room. From where Darracott stood he could hear every word they said, as they sang in a "round."

"Daddy in the pulpit," chirped one voice, flute-like in its tone.

"Wouldn't say his prayers," brayed a second.

"Down came the devil," yelled a third.

"And knocked 'en downstairs," concluded every one.

Darracott instinctively chopped with his hand, and off went the head of a wild arum berry in the cottage, as the shadows of three little heads nodded on the brightly lit wall revealed by the open door. It seemed strange to him that the laughter of children should have the temerity to sound so gaily in the close neighbourhood of his tortured heart.

Then he came forward to meet Ambrose at the corner where he must turn into the yard.

"Might I have a word with you, sir?" said Darracott, putting up his hand to the younger man's bridle-rein.

"With me?" said Ambrose, reining in suddenly in response to the urgency in Darracott's face. "Why," he exclaimed, after a second's inspection to make sure, "you're the man there's been all this talk about to-day! Well, I don't know that I am surprised at your coming. I suppose you thought you would take the bull by the horns."

Ambrose Velly's tone was half jesting, but his eyes grew hard with determination and something that closely resembled scorn.

Darracott noticed the hardening face above him, but was completely at a loss to understand it. Yet his own anger rose in answer to Velly's feeling of aversion.

"I wanted to speak to 'ee about something that's hard to speak about betwixt man and man," he said slowly.

"Well, get on, man, and have it over," said Ambrose, dismounting. "Come, walk down the road and have your say. I reckon I can give a guess at what you want."

"'Tis Thyrza Braund and what I seed last night—her dancing to your fiddling."

"Why," said Ambrose, standing still in amazement, "what the devil do you mean by speaking to me like this? And what has it got to do with you what Thyrza and I may choose to do?"

"Ay, that's what I said to myself, too. But now that I'm in trouble myself, I know how hard 'tis to bear. I'll not stand aside and see wrong done."

"Wrong done!" exclaimed Ambrose hotly.

"Wait a bit, sir. I said to myself, she's but a child and he's but a lad, and they don't know what's in the heart of men and women. For I love her dearly, and I wouldn't have her come to harm. Last night, her let fall some words that made me think, and then, when I seed 'ee with her, I knowed what she meant. God know's there's trouble enough in the world, without any more coming for want of a little plain speaking!"

"Look here, Darracott. I should have thought if you cared for her, you wouldn't want her name bandied about same as this is."

"I thought of that, too; but when you see a body sinking you don't ask where you're to grip. I want 'ee to leave the cheeld alone. She isn't a mate for the likes of you."

"Good God, man, what harm should I do her?"

"I'm a man and you're a boy and she's a cheeld. That's where it all is, sir. And nobody sees so plain as folks that love."

"You think she cares for me?" asked Ambrose.

"I know it," answered Darracott quietly.

The idea was undoubtedly pleasant to Ambrose, more especially as it fell in with certain suspicions of his own. He saw a mental picture of a bright personality that flashed triumphantly through life; it was himself, and he held himself very upright in the joy of the moment.

Then he laughed.

"Why, what a fool you must be, to come and talk like this to me, Darracott! A stark, staring lunatic."

"I've no hopes for myself; only thought for her, sir."

"You're a good fellow, anyway," said Ambrose heartily. "And I'm not a cad, though you think so. I give you my word of honour that I'll be as careful of Thyrza as you could be yourself. There, will that satisfy you? Why, I wouldn't hurt a little kitten like that for worlds!"

He felt Armiger, indeed, in the warmth of his own honourable intentions.

"And besides, I've other things to think about. You're in trouble, and so you go and run your head into an imaginary mare's nest. Your fears are air-born, man; air-born, I assure you."

For a moment his manner bore a ludicrous resemblance to Dr. Dayman's, for the lad had an unconscious habit of catching the tricks of voice and manner of any one with whom he came in contact.

"Anyway," he continued, "in my mother's house Thyrza is in as safe a nest as she would be in yours, Darracott. That I can promise you," he said, shaking back his head with a pleasant sensation of shedding peace all around him.

"Thank you, sir, for listening," said Darracott, turning back. He had gained at least a little confidence that the lad was forewarned.

"Here, Darracott, shake hands," said Ambrose, holding out his hand, "for you're a fine chap. And, for the matter of your own trouble, to-day's wreck and all the bother there'll be, don't give it another thought, as far as I am concerned, though I mean now to tell you what I know. I thought 'twas for that you came to see me to-night."

Darracott stood still, with the stony expression he wore when the wreck was mentioned.

"It's a damned bad system to give a man a five hours' look-out at night when he's been at work all day. You're the victim of a system. That's what I say about it."

"What do you mean—about knowing?" asked Darracott slowly.

"You weren't on the look-out last night," said Ambrose quietly, "and I know it."

"I was at the rocket-house," said Darracott dully.

"Not at two o'clock, then. For I was too excited to get any sleep last night, and I walked over to Quay and looked in at the rocket-station. There was no one there then. It was coming in to gusts of rain; but if they'd sent up distress signals, a man on watch at the Quay would have seen them."

"They didn't at the Point look-out."

" 'Twasn't within their sighting range. But you may be perfectly certain that what I know I shall keep to myself. And, as for Thyrza, she'll probably make you a hero, especially if folks take sides against you a bit. That's a woman's way. Anyhow, you've got to live this down. But I shan't give you away."

As Ambrose turned away from the misery in the man's face, something fluttered painfully in his own throat. But the pity of the human spectacle was soon lost in the pleasant reflection that Darracott's devotion weighed with Thyrza as dust in the balance, compared with the magic of his own indifference.

From a certain field-gate at Long Furlong, by sitting on the topmost bar, one could see the strip of sea where glide the ships, leaving a trail of black smoke behind them. Out there to Ambrose Velly's boyish eyes had been the place where men fight and win, gaining wealth and power, seeing strange sights and meeting strange enemies; out there was the world, far from the dull furrows of the fields and the dreary rustle of the reeds. Yet here in these very furrows was Ambrose eating of the tree of life. Or was it the tree of knowledge?

CHAPTER IV

HESPERUS

ONE evening, a few weeks later, the Rev. David Westaway was sitting in his study at Hartland Vicarage before the roll-top American desk that stood in his mind as a symbol of parish affairs. He leant back in his revolving chair, looking down the length of the room which contained indications of the varying phases of his sixty-one years of life. Floored with carefully-fitted planks of polished wood, it was furnished on one side with a sort of counter filled with trays of coins mounted on velvet; above this stood glass shelves loaded with specimens of china, especially Spode, Barum, and Plymouth ware. Facing these, on the other side of the room, were bookshelves stocked largely with scientific handbooks, from chemistry and archæology up to biology and psychology. There was a curious absence of theology in any form, unless a pile of *Hibbert Journals* came under that head. In strange juxtaposition to the material science of the West a row of works dealing with the wisdom of the East occupied the dark corner by the wall. There was the Rig Veda by the Upanishads, and the Sūtra of the Great Renunciation of Gautama Buddha next door to the Koran and the Light of Asia. Appropriately enough, the corner which sheltered these aliens in a country vicarage was the whole length of the room away from the parish desk, for the study, which ran the width of the house, had windows that faced one another, the front looking out on the square of Hartland village, and the back on a garden, now full of the gorgeous colours of "red-hot pokers" and late sunflowers. The desk looked out on the town place, but the Eastern sages were tucked away in the garden corner. But the most significant part of Mr. Westaway's library was not on these shelves at all; it was packed into the lower drawers of the bureau, and was neither scientific nor theological.

At the age of sixty most men show on which side of the battlefield of life they have ranged themselves, for they are then, not only men who have lost or won—whatever they set out to gain—but they are also conscious of their own success or failure. In Mr. Westaway's lined face, with the deep wrinkle of depression trenching the base of the pouchy cheeks, there was the look of a man who feared he was beaten. Yet, in the wiry shock of white hair, in the keen glance of his eyes, there was yet a spice left of the power that grips circumstances by the throat and forces them to yield their treasure of opportunity. It was evident, then, that if Mr. Westaway were beaten, he had, at any rate, not yet finished fighting.

Descended from a line of scholars, schoolmasters and clerics for the most part, he had been a slow youth, whose "late spring" was regarded as a sign of stupidity by his relatives. The Church seemed his fit destiny, for his steady virtues would make him an eminently respectable parish priest, and on a moderate amount of preferment he could certainly count, since several of his connections had reached the safe harbourage of a Cathedral Close. Hence it was almost without volition of his own that David Westaway found himself passing from one country rectory to another, none of them possessing anything to speak of in the way of income.

But five years ago, by the death of a north-country uncle who had amassed a fortune as a wool manufacturer, he had become a rich man, a very rich man according to his own frugal estimate. For he had known what it is to have to be careful of the coals. The money, chiefly mine shares and railway stock, carried with it no duties, according to the modern habit of reckoning business responsibilities, and merely gave Mr. Westaway an opportunity of gratifying his own cultured tastes. He counted himself, therefore, an exceptionally happy man.

But the issue proved quite otherwise; for after his tastes in numismatics had been gratified by the purchase of a few trays of coins, and his virtuoso-like sensibilities soothed by a china plate or two, he found that these delights only scratched the surface of his mind, for he was in truth made rather of the stuff of a thinker than an artist.

All his life he had known that the walls of the Church he served were being battered by attacks from every side. Yet he was aware that, as an honest man, his daily bread depended on his performing the duties of church service and prayer with a measure of belief in the efficacy of these things. Wife and child, house and home, are wonderfully narcotic to the brain and, like many another, Mr. Westaway deliberately refused to know what would either have made him a pauper or a conscious charlatan. Then, too, the loving-kindness of his nature was satisfied by the hallowed spirit of the past, no less than by the charitable opportunities of the present, and both lay within the power of the Church to impart.

But his newly-acquired wealth gave him a sense of mental freedom, of spiritual boldness and, like a woman who after years of reputed ugliness suddenly finds herself transformed into a beauty by a Paquin gown, Mr. Westaway flowered mentally, giving way at last to his desire to face the truth, or what was accounted truth by his own age.

And now to him it seemed, in his depression, that all his life had been a mere serving of the cult of conventional respectability, of no more concern with man's little span of daylight, or with his long curve of darkness, than the beating of a tom-tom. Thirty years of a man's short life thrown away; it was a bitter reflection and still more bitter when, as Mr. Westaway fancied, the habits of a lifetime have become like a skin which it is agony to slough off. The parish visits, the preparation of sermons, the walk to church with sober gait and eyes, if not commercing with the skies, at any rate, decently cast down; without these what was there left him to do? Without such tasks, he would count himself nothing but a shadow in a world of realities.

As he sat leaning back in the quiet room, reviewing the destructive work of the past months, he asked himself what account he could give of the non-faith, or rather of the faith, that was in him. For the attitude of mind perforce adopted by him during his clerical career, had made it as impossible for him to live without some form of faith as it would have been for him to breathe without air.

To-day the axes that hack at the structure of the Christian Church are being forged everywhere; in the historian's study, in the chemist's laboratory, in the market-place, and in the lecture-room of the student of comparative religion. It was this last that struck the most fatal blow at Mr. Westaway's faith. For the records of the historian cannot touch the spirit that speaks in the Gospels, even though they be no more than literary monuments; the chemist can only show that beyond the physical world we know, there are yet finer and finer phases of matter than "this muddy vesture of decay," and the man of the world who points to empty churches and millions deaf to the clanging from the church spires has yet to confess that this state of things leaves him dissatisfied.

But in the comparative study of religion Mr. Westaway saw the Church of the East placed over against the Church of the West, and found that while the former still tried to preach its message of purity, the latter had largely forgotten its message of love in the labours of the gigantic organisations which men call the Catholic, Protestant and Greek Churches. For to him the priesthoods stood but for the inculcating of habits of obedience and deference, of mental slavery in the service of a timid civilisation. "This is the way, walk ye in it," said the Churches. Mr. Westaway found that although he had been walking that way, he did not like it. For of what man really craves to know: of whence he comes, whither he goes, and why he lives at all, it seemed to Mr. Westaway that the Church was attempting to give but the vaguest of answers. And, said he to himself, men have to-day lost the inclination to continue burrowing in a rubbish heap for the jewel that their forefathers told them was hidden there.

At this point in the Vicar's reflections the door opened and Ambrose was announced. It was with a feeling that a sunbeam had come into the room that Mr. Westaway got up to greet the young man. He had often felt that it would be the unpaid lessons given to lads like this that would add up to his credit account. Besides, Ambrose had always been his favourite pupil; for it had been a delight to him to see the keen eyes flash, the bright head toss backwards, when a law of number leapt to his mind within. Mr. Westaway rejoiced in Ambrose Velly's vivid nature, in his craving for emotion, and his capacity for getting it from thought—one of the rarest and most enviable gifts in the world. It even delighted the Vicar to look at the sheen of hair and eyes and skin, young and clear, like the brain within.

"Well, Ambrose," he said as they sat down, "it's two years since you have been here. And now you're home again. I'm sorry for the cause of it; but no one's the worse for having some tangible evil to struggle with sometimes. What have you been doing?"

"Learning to draw up specifications mostly. Figuring for ever, areas and strains and weights—and cheapness."

"Disappointed?"

"Not a bit, sir! For that's what I had to learn first. My master didn't talk much, but he knew; and now and again he'd burst out and talk, so that you saw what he cared for. First, I was sent surveying for mine 'setts' up on Caradon, for you know Cornish mining is looking up a bit. Then the last year I've sometimes been a sort of clerk of works at the little buildings—a Methodist chapel or a schoolroom, perhaps. I liked it; it sharpened a fellow's wit. Then evenings I worked at drawing. Oh, I played the virtuous apprentice, I can tell you, sir. The old man had to struggle with—things. So I learnt to do it, too."

"You went out to find a kingdom, and found——"

"My father's asses," laughed Ambrose. "Well, perhaps so; but the asses'll come in uncommon handy when I enter into my kingdom."

The laugh and the blush tempered the arrogance of his speech, as he looked round the room with intense enjoyment of its interests, for the bare, bookless, pictureless farm rooms looked desert-like beside this place.

In many houses the most important part is the front door, for it shuts so much selfishness inside and so much unsatisfied need outside. The Westaway house was by no means of this sort; it was a wide-open place in every sense of the word, with windows opened to the sunshine, planetary, intellectual, and moral. Its low, wide, easy rooms smelt of books and flowers, of kind thoughts and deep enthusiasms.

There *Free Russia* and the *Humanitarian* lay cheek by jowl with the *Nineteenth Century* or the *Quarterly Review*, for David Westaway liked the bypaths as well as the open highways of thought. Not in vain was there carved over the study mantelpiece the sentence—

Homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum puto.

Ambrose read the inscription and thought it somehow most inappropriate to his host; for to the youth's knowledge of the rougher side of life there was something old-maidish in Mr. Westaway's figure and surroundings.

Then he started to his feet as the Vicar's daughter came into the room. Ambrose had been trying vainly to screw up his courage to enquire if she were at home.

At first sight Damaris Westaway's manner was her greatest charm; gracious, peaceful and open-hearted, it calmed irritated minds, soothed evil tempers and, greatest triumph of all, suggested no shadow of lethargy. The mind behind the blue-grey eyes, the blue-grey of the far hills, was alert, the heart quick beating with the tide of life, and the pulses rhythmic with the great calm things of the world. The long oval of her face that seldom pulsed with colour, the straight eyebrows, the firmly closed, yet full lips, matched the direct glance of her eyes, the lithe swing of her slim body, the slight curves of her breast, neither full nor meagre; a well-poised woman, whose body had not grown at the expense of her head, nor her heart at the expense of either.

She greeted Ambrose warmly, while Dr. Dayman stood in the doorway behind with a great portfolio under his arm.

"Now," he said, without pausing for salutations, for he was almost as much at home in this house as in his own next door, "Now, I've had a deuced hard day and I'm going to sit in the easiest chair in the room, lean back, shut my eyes, and listen to you, Princess, while you play Chopin and then sing the Jewel Song from 'Faust,' over in the drawing-room yonder. We'll have the two doors open, and then your voice will come from the distance."

"Where you like it best, doctor," she said, laughing back over her shoulder as she crossed the hall to obey his orders.

"And if anybody has any objection, let him keep it to himself," said the doctor, paying no attention to her gibe, but settling himself comfortably for his pleasure.

Mr. Westaway moved restlessly in his chair, for the moonlit passion of the Chopin music was disquieting to him. The movement was symbolic of the contradiction that had been a trouble to him all his life—a contradiction that was crystallised, as it were, in the books on political economy that lay packed in the bottom drawers of his bureau. For the crisis in his mind was not intellectual merely, but social mainly, and it was not only on his profession, but on his wealth, that the iconoclastic spirit of to-day seemed to him to be laying its hands.

He read little political economy as a rule, till one day there came into his hands, sent by mistake from his bookseller, a packet of strangely disquieting works, translated from Russian and German. As he read, the books hit him through a curious personal foible, as, indeed, great conceptions often do. He was a rabid lover of order, and unless he knew the house from cellar to attic was what Damaris called "straight," he was unhappy and restless. He loved the country mainly because it brought less evidence to his senses of the presence of wreckage—human and otherwise. London was always unbearable to him for more than a few days, because of the miserable phantoms who haunt its pavements and loom up its squalid side streets. But here, in the awful realism of the novels, or in the even more awful statistics of the political economists, there stared him in the face the disorder of the human universe; so many millions hungry, so much that might feed them going to waste. Room for all, and crowded alleys swarming with human beings like lice on the crannies of an ancient house.

The idea became an obsession, till now he was face to face with his own life, his own wealth. For the conviction came to him that he, personally, was a factor that added to the sum total of the world's disorder. In this state of mind he came across the work in which the great Russian thinker, Tolstoi, dissects the cause of this evil, the human reliance on force. "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil"; night and day, of late, these words were before Mr. Westaway. For his wealth was supported by the arm of force, and protected by all the legal and political power of the country. And in the horror of the wealth came a revolt at the ease and beauty that springs from wealth; a mental revolt only, for by temperament he loved the refinements of civilisation.

His was, in truth, a nature wrested from its inborn instincts for the refinements of pleasure by the intrusive appeal of those who in all ages have called with clarion voice for a new world, where the former things, the selfishness, violence, and impurity, shall have passed away. In the days of Savonarola, Mr. Westaway would have placed his coins and prints on the bonfire of vanity, and have mourned ever after for his departed treasures; in the days of Luther, he would have cast off monkish traditions, and have yearned incessantly for the cosy comfort of a cowl; in the days of Walt Whitman, Tolstoi, and Ibsen, he took to a diet of husks and sought simplicity in the cult of the spade, or rather, one side of him longed to do so. For fire-brand reformers achieve three results: they enhance the conscious greed of the greedy, they ennoble the lofty-minded, and they make the minds of the weaker brethren exceedingly uncomfortable: Mr. Westaway was a weaker brother.

At last came the music of the Jewel Song in Damaris Westaway's full, rich voice, while Dr. Dayman held up his hand to make sure that no one creaked his chair.

"Ah, well," said he, as the song ended, "there's a fair world for them that can get it, and there's another. I've seen both to-night. I've just brought into this sublunary scene a hopeless cripple, born of a half-witted drab—and in there is Damaris singing the Jewel Song. Gad ! how comes it about, the Jewel Song and that knave-begotten brat ?"

"And," said Mr. Westaway bitterly, "how many knave-begotten brats are not these Jewel Songs, these Wagner Choruses, these lime-lighted passions, answerable for? And as for that Chopin music, I wanted to shut the door on it. It brought back the past."

"The dear, damned, delightful past," said Dr. Dayman with a chuckle. "Well, I've loved many women, and what I say of one, I say of all—brown-skinned, fair-skinned, straight-haired and curly, matron and maid or little lassie in her teens—God bless 'em, one and all ! But I don't take things crosswise as you do. I've kissed my girl in the days gone by, and I drink my wine now I'm old, and take no shame to myself for either. And as for you, why, Gad-a-mercy, man, didn't you have that damigella of yours trained to sing? 'He that is merry, let him sing psalms,' I suppose that's what you thought," fumed the doctor, while Ambrose chuckled and wished he could have expressed the same sentiments as vigourously as the doctor had done.

"Her mother," said Mr. Westaway slowly, "was singing like a bird when I first saw her—and scrubbing the floor of a village inn. Yet she was a loving and a lovely gentlewoman by nature. We had a year of heaven, and then she died and left me Damaris."

"The only thing in the world I envy you for," said Dr. Dayman.

"Well, Ambrose," he said, suddenly remembering that he was not alone with Mr. Westaway, "what do you think of it all?"

The lad leant forward, his cheek flushing. "It's fine, he said; "the music, I mean. It shakes you up, till you wonder what you're made of inside, to feel so."

"Made of mud," growled Dr. Dayman, "and snips and snaps, and puppy dogs' tails, that's what you're made of. Just you sit on your emotions a bit more, or—or you'll find yourself in dock. You've to do with the plastic arts, with stones and paint," he said, snapping each word like the click of a revolver. "Pulse going anyhow, I'll warn. Sit on your emotions, will you, and come over and look at what I've got here."

Dr. Dayman drew a chair up to a table, and opened the portfolio. He held each paper, as he took it out, directly under his eyes, screwing up the lids in the light of the lamp he had brought over from the desk. Mr. Westaway sat watching the two, but Damaris had not returned to the room.

"Sit down, sit down, and let's hear what you've got to say to that," said the doctor, placing a print before Ambrose, and folding his hands comfortably upon the front of his well-lined waistcoat.

It was a curious wood-engraving. Amid knotty tree-trunks and coiling serpents a naked man held the handle of a plough. From an attenuated figure to the left bright rays gleamed upon the straining horses and the man who drove, upon a group of dancing nymphs, and a flock of sheep. In one corner a man drove a stake into a serpent, and in another rose a cluster of standing corn.

"The light falls from the left," said Ambrose doubtfully, after a pause. "I can't tell about the dancing figures, though; they're out of it somehow."

"Why?"

"It's hard—the battle and"— he hesitated for a word—"ugly."

"You know what it means?"

"It's the earth—the fight with it."

"Ay, man's fight with the forces of nature—hard and ugly fighting, as you say."

The doctor took off the lamp-shade and flung it on the floor in order to look at Ambrose more closely. He was surprised at finding so much intelligence.

"The figure to the left is the sun, I suppose," said Ambrose, "or God."

"And the dancing nymphs, lad, are the joys of the fight, of harvest and vintage, and the old earth licked with her own weapons. You're no fool, boy. Now, look ye here," he said, pushing forward another plate.

Ambrose laughed. "That's plain," he said, "anyway. There's the moon on one side of the house and the stars on t'other, and the cow and the sheep underneath 'em and man and wife going to bed; in the storeroom it looks like, for there's apples about and the man's bill-hook hung up. They'll be asleep in each other's arms before long," he grinned.

"That's as it may be," said the doctor virtuously. "That's Edward Calvert's *Chamber Idyll*, Edward Calvert of Appledore."

"It's a thatched roof," said Ambrose, paying no heed, "a thatched roof that comes down pretty nigh upon the bed—a regular old slee room, like the back bedrooms at Long Furlong."

"Do you know why I show you these?" asked Dr. Dayman, showing him the *Cyder Feast* with the breath of joy that blows like a great wind through it, the tender *Return Home*, with the woman waiting across the dim fields, with that sweetest pillow for man's weariness, a true and faithful heart.

"No," said Ambrose, looking up with the light of new thought smouldering in his eyes; "but they're mighty queer. Who did 'em?"

"I told you. Edward Calvert, born at Appledore."

"Appledore?" said Ambrose in surprise.

"Yes; of course you know Appledore well enough. He's pretty near one of our own people. But I didn't show you these prints for that reason. I did it because here's a man who loved the earth, just the earth that you turn with your ploughshare. He loved the sweet dripping of the cider juice, the clear shining of rain-drops in the sun, the sheep that nibble in the water-meads. Ay, a man and wife undressing themselves for bed, with the cow and the sheep outside, and the sickle moon watching their hours of bliss. Your fathers, Velly, loved the earth, too, ploughed it, trod on it and sleep in it."

He stopped, carried away by the rush of his own fire. Ambrose drew a deep breath, and was silent, but his eyes glowed.

"Edward Calvert, North Devon artist, that has yet to come into his own," said the doctor. "But that's no matter. You're in the land of artists. East and west, and north and south of 'ee, they be," he said, lapsing further into Devon. "Just look at 'em, the great Sir Joshua from Plympton, as great in portraiture as Turner is in landscape; Sam Prout, who dreamt dreams and saw visions in stone, and who loved the very timber and tiles he drew; Calvert, the earth lover and dreamer of the golden age, from Appledore; Thomas Hudson, Sir Joshua's master; old Nicholas Hilliard, limner to Elizabeth and James, of whom Dr. Donne says—

> A hand or eye
> By Hilliard drawn, is worth a history
> By a worse painter made.

Cousins, the prince of mezzotint engravers from Exeter; Richard Cosway, master of miniature, from Tiverton; Haydon, Eastlake, and Northcote, dreamers of history, from Plymouth; James Gandy, whom Sir Joshua found not inferior to the Venetians in colouring, and William his son, not far below him, whose names are mentioned in Gandy Street, Exeter; as well as Opie from Cornwall. And the greatest of them all called himself a Devon man, for didn't Turner say to Cyrus Redding, 'They may put me down among the Devon artists, for I was born in Devon'? I went over to look at the graves of his ancestors in the wormy old Southmolton churchyard the other day."

"And are there no Devon architects?" asked Ambrose, his cheeks burning at the temerity of his thought, which Dr. Dayman guessed.

"So that Ambrose Velly may be the greatest in the Pantheon, eh, lad? Well, the list goes back to the sixteenth century and begins with John Shute, the father of English miniature painting, and the author of a book on architecture. He played a scurvy trick on England, though, for when the Duke of Northumberland sent him to Italy, in Queen Bess's time, he came back with his head full of the fandangles of Renaissance architecture. *The first and chiefe Grounds of Architecture used in all the ancient and famous Monyments;* that's the title of his book, or a bit of it, at any rate. Ay, you'll be in good company, I assure you, among the Devon artists. And reason good, for look what a county it is. Why, what is it you sing in church?

"'O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

"'O ye Mountains and Hills, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

"I'll make a new reading. It ought to be—

"O all ye children of Devon, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

"O ye Tors and Moors of Devon, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

He burst into a fit of Homeric laughter that made the servants in the kitchen wonder what was toward.

"Look at her, lad," he shouted; "wind-swept moors, thundering surges, soft rains that fall like gossamer, valleys deep in blossom, heather purple as the shadows thrown by old wine. Look at her, boy, and all this in a climate, at one moment iridescent like chrysoprase, pearls upon moonstone, as old Calvert has it; at another, clear, clear, clear, like a wind out of the North. Ye Gods of Olympus, what a land for a painter, what a land for a lover, what a land for a poet!"

Then he flung himself back in his chair with a laugh at his own vehemence, while Ambrose stood quite still with bent head. Of old the Gods met men at the turning of the road, and often but in lowly guise; had Dr. Dayman been fancifully inclined, he might have imagined himself to be Apollo, the light-bringer, for in the youth's heart there had begun the clear shining of that fair Hesperus, Star of the West, the finest passion of his life.

But the doctor had descended to the valleys.

"Where's that bottle of sloe gin," he asked, "that I sent in last night?"

The doctor's sloe gin was famous, and, moreover, being niggardly in his old age, Dr. Dayman liked to get the full credit for his somewhat rare gifts, and even to participate personally in the enjoyment of them. It was often noticed that if, in the morning, a fortunate household received a crab from the doctor, the donor himself would drop in to supper that night, for he was excessively fond of crab.

The sloe gin appeared, and Ambrose was just holding his glass up to the light, in order to add the pleasure of another sense to that of taste when, with a soft rustle of silk, Damaris came into the room once more.

"Now," she said, "something tells me that there are drawings in that case of yours, Mr. Velly."

"They're hardly worth looking at after these," he said, colouring as he touched the Calvert portfolio.

"Well, you couldn't expect them to be," answered Damaris briskly; "for these are the picked work of a lifetime."

"But what," interposed Mr. Westaway, "did you really think of those Calvert prints, Ambrose?"

It was chiefly, perhaps, a tinge of rugged honesty in Ambrose, a certain Rabelaisian faculty of laughing at solemn pretensions, that had first attracted Mr. Westaway to him, next to the brightness of his look. For poor Mr. Westaway had been so much smothered in the incense of sanctity that he loved a lad who had no trace of sentimentality about him.

"Did you really like those pictures?" he asked curiously, recalling, as he spoke, the idealism which is so marked in Calvert's woodcuts.

"No," said Ambrose bluntly; "I don't believe I did. I know they're good—in a way. But they aren't beautiful in themselves. There's that *Cyder Feast*, the girl's a skinny thing, and in the *Return Home* the man's an ugly brute humped up on a deformed ass; and in the other the man's muscles are as stiff as iron. They're not beautiful," he repeated, "though I suppose they mean things."

He coloured furiously at the length of his speech, when he felt the three pairs of eyes on him.

"They mean beautiful things," said Damaris coldly; "the long, long battle of man's spirit, the beauty of faithful love."

Then she stopped, carried away by a sort of anger, while Dr. Dayman watched the two young people with a smile.

"He's a pagan, my dear," he interposed, "a frank hedonist. He wants round curves, hair that curls, and lips that pout. Leave the young rip alone, for he hasn't a notion yet of the beauty that's under the skin. Come, let's see the drawings," he said, taking pity on the boy's downcast face.

The first was a picture of Mouth Mill Cove, or rather of the contorted curves of strata called the Black Church Rocks. The inky cliffs, the roaring surge, the echoes of the valley, the booming of the pebbles: the place is stark with power and vivid as the leap of a jet of blood. Mouth Mill is the chief landing-place of the district, and is used as a coal quay by the farmers; but even here it is only possible to come in with one tide and go out with the same. Wait for the second and the boat will be dashed to pieces with the cannonade of rollers on the pebbles.

Damaris saw the failure of this painting; the rock formations were right enough, but the wave-lines were rigid, stone-carved.

"Ah, that's better !" she cried, as the doctor passed her a second.

Through the arching strata gleamed the sea; set in the frame of black stone, the waves shone luminous under a lilac sky. It was a picture of the peace that passeth all understanding. Silently the doctor passed her sketches of thatched cob-cottages and weather-stained farm buildings.

"You think in stone, Ambrose," she said at last. "You remind me of Prout's failure to paint waves. But the stone-work is very careful."

Ambrose flushed, for he had hoped for louder praise than this, and, artist-like, prided himself on what he could do least well. For at this stage of his work he was sending out tentacles into every kingdom of endeavour—painting, carving, practising black-and-white work. In some indignation at this curt dismissal of his efforts, he packed up his sketches and said good-night, while Damaris accompanied him to the door.

"What's troubling you, Westaway?" said Dr. Dayman, as the door closed behind Ambrose and Damaris. Mr. Westaway had evidently been in a brown study for the last ten minutes—a sad one to judge by his looks.

"Dayman," he answered, "you're a man used to looking things in the face."

"It's my business to do so," said the doctor placidly, from the midst of the haze of tobacco smoke that wreathed his great head.

"It's not been mine," said the Vicar; "for I seem to have made it my business to look askance at everything."

"Professional habit, probably," said Dr. Dayman, with a laugh. He had no very keen love of the cloth, though he placed a high value on the individual worth of many who wore it.

"That's what I feel," said Mr. Westaway; "for there comes a time in every man's life when he ought to try and get away from the merely professional standpoint."

"Humph !" growled the doctor, recalling a sermon he had heard Mr. Westaway preach on the great undone creative acts, the might-have-beens of the moral world. "You're doing it too late, Westaway; for there's a deal of sense in the notion of the old woman in George Eliot, that high-learnt folks get their thinking done early, so as to get it over once and for all. Thinking's like sugar—good for the young, but gouty for the old. 'Omnia exeunt in mysterium'; it's the law and the prophets, and you can't get beyond it. I should have thought that the habits of a lifetime would have been a sufficient prophylactic against the green-sickness of speculation."

"I'm in trouble, Dayman," said the Vicar, as though appealing for something less like a sneer. "I've done the thinking, indeed. Now comes the acting. I'm going to leave the Church."

The doctor leant forward, nipping his pipe.

"Difficulties?" he asked. "Oh, come now. They're out of date. We've all agreed to ignore 'em. In the days of Darwin and Huxley, it might have been *de rigueur;* but now it's the era of the reconciliation of soul and body, or rather, body's soul and soul's body, and no man can tell t' other from which nowadays."

"It isn't that at all, Dayman. It's life—the life of to-day that's got at me. Everybody is mentally alive to-day, except the priest and the mere drudge, and we are rapidly reducing the numbers of the latter. Here is the scientist pressing into the unknown world, passing point after point in the uncharted seas of life; here is the social reformer daring the rocks of experiment with a spirit bolder than the purpose of a Columbus or a Pizarro. Look here, Dayman," he said, getting up and beginning to quarter-deck up and down, "we're on the verge of a new age of life, or we shall be when we've placed our footstep on the North Pole and the South. No, I'm not crazy," he said, with a laugh at the doctor's face of surprise. "Think. What was it in the past that bred men of heroic stuff? What has it always been?"

"War and exploration," snapped the doctor.

"Just so. And"—he pointed with the finger of prophecy—"our inventions will in time make war—first, an affair of mathematics, and then, impossible, while the last inch of the Unknown will soon be mapped and surveyed on this globe. What then? Shall we rot in spiritual inaction? Nay, nay; wider fields than ever the mind of man has conceived are opening before us daily—fields where the vistas are more awful than any floes of polar ice; for with matter that exists on many more planes than our common senses show, and with age-long life coming daily within our certain knowledge, who can say what we shall be?"

"I don't see why all this should prevent you from distributing blankets, or even offering prayer. Behind it all —all these planes of matter—is the Unknown—the Unknown God, if you will. It strikes me we'll want a damned sight more prayer than ever before, if what you say is true. And I grant you there do seem to be a few staggering facts about the universe. Anyway, put it at its lowest, your order is urbane; it oils things a bit, organises a lot of charity, and employs the energies of an immense number of women."

"All very well; but as you know perfectly, that's not what we're supposed to exist for. We ought to know as much about the soul as the doctor does of the body. And we don't. That's just all about it. We don't. The people ask us plain questions as to what is the constitution of man, and we're still disputing about St. Paul's analysis of the human organism. We can't tell the nations half as much as a man who looks into all the creeds and picks out the little gem of truth that each enshrines; no, nor half as much as the scientist who can talk of nothing but the fourth dimension. And why have we nothing to tell? Because it's nearly two thousand years ago that we learnt anything. And of what we learnt then we've falsified two-thirds. We talk as if the message given nineteen hundred years ago was the last words from the unseen, when perhaps the newest message is in—to-day's paper."

There was a long silence, then the doctor said—

"Ay, you're right, Westaway; you must go. For the priest of any Church is bound to back his own Church's creed, his own Church's scheme of things. But yours is all so draughty."

"So draughty?" questioned Mr. Westaway.

"Why, yes. Like other old folks, I like a nice cosy room, and here you are, tossing me out into chaos, with a howling wind of doubt giving me goose-flesh all over. I like standing up to say a comfortable creed."

But the Vicar's mind was turned in quite a different direction. For the oldest leaves on the tree shake most easily in the wind, and now Mr. Westaway was passing in age under those simplicities of the New Testament which every period has interpreted in its own fashion. The absolute literalness of the reading: "Give all that thou hast," had at first struck him painfully, then with conviction.

"The other day," he said slowly, with an inward gaze, "the other day I took part in a Cathedral service to which there came in procession, the judge on circuit, the mayor and corporation, the aldermen and police. They came to thank God for having raised them up. And the day before the judge had been employed in sentencing a poor, ignorant fellow-creature to hard labour for stealing a pair of boots. In the fanfaronade of trumpets from their gold-laced footmen, sounded the triumph of the lord of this world. And they came to the temple of the Teacher who bade us turn the other cheek to an assailant."

"Well, top-dog, you know," said Dr. Dayman truculently; "for that's what all *that* means. We can't do yet without judges and police, though I shouldn't care to be one myself. Civilisation, at least in the present form, demands that quite half the people who carry it on should have no imagination. Look at that chap Darracott, for instance; he's having a hell of a time. And for nothing more than just because he happens to be able to see pictures—of what perhaps didn't happen at all as he sees it. I tell you what it is, David, you've got a temperature of 104 degrees, Tolstoi—and I can't operate. If you'd only caught something in *itis*, instead of something in *ism*, I might."

"No," said Mr. Westaway, with a smile, " 'tis I, Cleopas, who must do the operating this time."

When moved below the surface they were David and Cleopas to one another, for in truth they were mutually in love with their weaknesses; for David was a student with more ichor than blood in his veins, and Cleopas an earthbound, a carnal old rascal, perhaps, but heartsome, like a squire out of the pages of Fielding. In any case, one was the antithesis of the other.

CHAPTER V

THE KING OF SHADOWS

SLOWLY the sunlight touched the billowy ridges of the old slates on Long Furlong roof, turning the lichen-patches into spots of gold, bathing the head of the one gable in warmth, and showing up the depth of shadow that still covered the walled garden, with its shrubs of fuchsia and hydrangea springing from the deep, mossy turf.

Suddenly there swept across the farm a film of rain, the drops shining like gleaming points of silver against the golden background of sunshine. Sighing, quivering, the damp gossamer of it hovered over the place, bringing out the goodly scent of earth and lichen, fern and weed. Then the sunlight widened into the peace of a golden dawn, and the sleeper within the gable-room sighed and awoke, fixing his eyes on the moulded ceiling, the glory of the house. Over the mantelpiece were the letters W. M. A. and the date 1627, interwoven in a design of pine-apples, with a long, flat buckled strap. This piece of ancient handicraft represented for Ambrose all the art treasures of the world, the awe of cathedral arches, the mystery of marble forms, the charm of painted canvas.

As he dressed, the racy homeliness of the scent of damp earth came from the open window to his nostrils. These two powers, the sense of skilled craftsmanship and the scent of the earth, were to be the dominant forces in Ambrose

Velly's destiny, coming as they did from the two strains in his blood, that of the Huguenot worker and the English squire. For underneath his love of beauty was the peasant's love of the land, his craving to possess it, handle it, own it, to make it his mistress. Out of this heritage of his fathers there had, doubtless, grown his desire to create in stone, the most material form of expression an artist can adopt. Hence, too, no doubt, his instinctive love of Gothic, which speaks almost as intimately of the life of the soil as the very trees that grow from it. From his mother's line he had possibly derived his sense of the fineness of skilled labour that, coupled with the power of hand and eye, gives the plastic artist.

Yet a third power was to rule, but of that only Mrs. Velly and John Darracott guessed the presence. To a fanciful mind, indeed, the fates always come in triple form. With the skilled hand of Minerva to give him victory in art, and Juno of the fruitful breast to give him the produce of the earth, Ambrose Velly might have fared well enough. But there remained to him, also, a third goddess, she who comes dove-drawn, but with the power of the great eagle, to spoil and ravin; for Ambrose, the altar of Venus was to stand hard by the temple of Juno and under the awful frown of Minerva.

Whilst he huddled on his clothes, he glanced at the table under the window where lay Vivian's *Visitations of Devon*, lent him by Dr. Dayman, side by side with a modern manual of heraldry that was his own. From the next room there came the sound of a man's yawn. As he heard it, a flush passed across the lad's face, for there in the pedigrees of gentle families stood the name Velly, now sunk to yeoman rank and possibly to sink lower; for in the next room, in the shape of his father, was a living incarnation of the slackness of fibre that had brought the Velly family low.

Still, his ancestry was a comfort to Ambrose, and he held his head the higher for it as he went downstairs to the milking of the cows and the grooming of the horses.

An hour later square patches of sunlight dappled the blue slates of the kitchen floor. At the end of the table towards the fire the family were at breakfast, while at the draughty end near the yard door was the place for the retainers, now limited to old Caleb who, "man and boy," had served the Velly family for nearly thirty years.

With a long squawk of the bench along the slates he prepared for action, prefacing it with his usual grace before meat.

"Good stomich to 'ee, Maister," said he, with a nod. "Good stomich to 'ee, Missus; Good stomich to 'ee, Maister Ambrose."

It was the "Now, good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both," but more succinctly expressed. This done, he addressed himself solemnly to the "good dollop of fry" that steamed on the table before him. From his round, weather-beaten face, fringed with a monkey frill of ruddy hair, his queer eyes, one blue-grey, the other reddish-brown, wrinkled cutely round the other end of the table.

"Market-merry last night again," he said to himself, eyeing his master out of the corner of his grey eye; "and sour as a crab," he added by way of summary.

"Your daughter going to stay with you a bit, Caleb?" said Mrs. Velly.

"No; her isn't going to bide over to-day, Missus. Didn't know her was coming when her did come, nuther."

His voice seemed to come, thin and piping, from far buried depths within.

"What's the matter with your voice, Caleb? It sounds going to pieces like."

"Iss; there's summat in my oazle-pipe, I reckon. 'Twill be with me like 'twas with old Sol Sanguin that sung tenor up to Holsworthy. The parson come along one forenoon and seed 'en standing up to his neck in water in the stream. Says he, 'Sol, what the gallis be doing there?' He didn't say no more than that, being a man o' God and bound to vent aisy. 'Why,' says Sol, 'the bass up to choir can't sing to-morra morning, and here be I trying to get a hose (cold) so's I can take the bass!"

"'Tis a bit of a cold, Missus, thank 'ee, and I be already as deaf as a addick," he added cheerfully.

"They calves down to Four Acres don't sim to me to goody, Maister," he observed after a pause. "Might so well shift 'em to-morra," he concluded, seeing that no answer was vouchsafed.

Mr. Velly grunted in token of assent.

"They'll be carr'ing the first field up to Blegberry to-day, I hear," said Caleb.

"Yes," said Ambrose; "they're short-handed, too. And as 'tis slack time, now ours isn't cut, I'm going over to lend a hand."

"What's that for?" said Mr. Velly, rousing himself. "What's it to you if they are short-handed?"

"Nothing," said Ambrose, defiantly putting the bare truth. "But harvest pay's harvest pay, and Caleb can rub along for a day or so without me."

"So you're willing to play loblolly boy for a shilling or two, as if there wasn't work enough for 'ee here—and mostly left undone, too."

"Nay, nay, father, the lad's a good worker," said Mrs. Velly, with a scowl at the offending Caleb, who was hurriedly packing up his plate and cup in preparation for a rapid exit. "Don't 'ee be so maggotty-headed, there's a good man. We're not the sort nowadays to ride the high horse."

"That's always your way, Missus, always was, standing up for the young varmint. If I'd give 'en the buckle-strap every time that you wouldn't let me, he wouldn't be the tom-fool he is now. Why, he's no son of mine; he's a molly-coddle, and makes himself the laughing stock of the parish—and all over an old hare."

"I only did what anybody who wasn't a brute would have done," panted Ambrose, disregarding his mother's imploring look.

"Any body but a gapper-mouth, you mean," sneered Mr. Velly. "I shall never forget it."

One of the discomforts of living with Mr. Velly was his habit of repeating perfectly familiar unpleasant stories, merely because there was a sting in them. "The harriers had a good run," he said, "a matter of five miles or so, till a rum thing happened upon cliff top by Damehole Point. I saw the hounds clear the cliff and scent the beach. Sure 'nuff, thought I, hare's took to sea. And so she had—swam out a yard or two and the dogs barking in the surf. Now what did this young hopeful of ours do, but nip in after her and catch her up in his arms with a twist of his whip ! Thought I, 'there's some spunk in the fellow after all.' But I'm damned if he didn't let her go, with all the huntsmen rounding on 'en from cliff edge."

" 'Twas run blind," stammered Ambrose. "It's devilish, getting fun out of torture like that."

There flashed from the eyes of both disputants the hate that comes of close kinship and close likeness, the ugliest sort of hate in nature; for it springs from the most intimate knowledge of all, self-knowledge. Blood of one's blood; out of it leaps one's own cruelty, weakness, or lust, intimate, familiar, abhorrent.

As Ambrose flung himself out of the room it was the incessantly repeated taunt, in the same old words and phrases that produced a mad longing to escape from this life of hopeless struggle.

"The lad's a good lad, James," said Mrs. Velly. "He's given to fancies, maybe, but he's no trouble in other ways."

"Fancies or no, that lad'll give us trouble before we're dead and gone. You mark my words."

"Then he'll only be the very spit of his father in that way, James. It's a deal of trouble you've always been to me and always will be. But there, 'tis what was to be. Menfolk be made to worrit, and apern-folk (women) to put up with 'em."

"Talk, talk, talk," growled Mr. Velly. "You and your precious son be both alike in that. Buzz, buzz, buzz, and do nothing all day long, like an apple-drane in a cow-flop."

Mrs. Velly smiled grimly, for if there was any one at Long Furlong as useless as a wasp in a foxglove, it was James Velly, often "market-merry," and always as slack as a half-baked loaf. She often wondered what mental image he saw of himself in the reflecting-glasses of his soul. Then she laughed as he rubbed his shining, bald head, as domelike as that of his son's.

"Let me tell you a story, James. Once there was a man in a club getting sick-pay; so his wife said to their son, 'Jacky, if all goes well and your father keeps poorly, we'll have a fortnight's holiday this year instead of a week.' If only you were in a club and could get sick-pay, how happy we should be, James; for, my dear soul, you'd be more useful that way than you ever will be when you're out and about."

Mr. Velly was not likely to go wrong for lack of plain speaking from his wife.

Down the lonely lanes, through which Ambrose rode to his work, the central ridges were grass-grown and mossy, the side-ruts deep in soft dust. The long shadows of morning lay almost from one hedge to another, where gossamer threads had been spun that glittered dew-gemmed on the sunny side of the road.

Built of grey, weather-beaten stone, with an outer wall like the line of circumvallation of a fortress, Blegberry stands almost on the cliffs. The sea wind whistles about its huddled shoulders, the rain lashes its crouching back. No window looks directly seaward, and the front door opens into a tiny square pleasaunce enclosed on all sides by high walls and crowded with fuchsias, myrtles, and rock-work. The wind blows "true" up at Blegberry, for there are no trees to groan and protest, only a low stone house built for noiseless resistance.

To-day, as Ambrose stood on the cart he was loading, the whole coast-line lay plain before him on both sides of Hartland Point. The long ridges of shark-tooth rocks that line the foot of the cliffs gleamed black as jet in the glimpses of them revealed by the foam of the tide. Needle-points of rock out beyond, in the spray of the churning tide, blazed with the cruel glitter of steel in the sunlight. Headland after headland, contorted into grotesque shapes æons ago by the upheavals of the strata and now grass-grown, with nodding heads of sea-pinks in the crevices, crouched prone, with sphinx-like heads gazing over the tossing lines of Atlantic rollers. Smoothlands, at whose foot the tragedy of the *Flying Foam* had taken place, rose just below the field they were saving, like the upward sweep of a wave arrested in mid-course. From its verge there was a fall of seventy-five feet to the sea, straight as a plummet could drop, while bell-heather glowed all up the landward side. The light gleamed on the light-houses of Lundy, ten miles away, over the laughing ripples of the sun-flecked waves. Away in the west the dim forms of Cornish headlands rose, blue-grey in the silver of the sea.

"Lundy high, sign of dry;
Lundy plain, sign of rain,"

said Michael Prust, the man who was loading by the side of Ambrose. He paused to dash the sweat from his face with the back of a hairy, sun-burnt hand.

"And which is it to-day?" asked Ambrose.

"Blest if I know. Ever bin to the Kingdom of Heaven, mister?" he asked, using the local synonym for Lundy, derived from the name of its owner.

"No; nor don't expect to."

"No more don't I, if you come to that. But I've been over there," he said, pointing to the island; "went over in the *Gannet* from Appledore, and pretty nigh left my inside behind. There's a mort of fine granite there, though."

"'Tis a bit of Dartmoor cropped up, they say. In Jubilee year Lundy ran short of water," said Ambrose, "but when a thunderstorm with clouds of rain came upon Dartmoor, the springs of Lundy filled."

"A bit of learning's a fine thing," said Michael. "That's what I say if my boys take to miching from school, for they'm 'nointed chaps, they be."

"How many is it now, Michael?" shouted Abraham Ridd.

"Well, now, you've asked a question," said Michael with a wink. "Whether it were nine or ten the last time missus counted 'em, I'm danged if I can tell 'ee."

"Iss," said William Crocker, a long, melancholy Jaques of a man, with a face like an ancient horn-lanthorn for obscurity and bewilderment "that's a trade that never fails."

"How many is it now, Bill?" asked Prust.

"Nineteen, as I'm a living sinner," said Bill; "us tried hard for the twentieth, but our second girl had a mishap in the fall, and that made up the twenty."

"Ay, it tries a man, it do," said Ridd; "and 'tis wonderful what becomes of a pound of cheese with a family like that."

"But there's nineteen golden sovereigns laid by for 'em," said Bill.

"And none for the little twentieth?" asked Ambrose.

"Well, you couldn't look for it for the like of that. Born wrong side of the blanket, you see, maister."

So little twentieth had to learn early in life the nature of the world's justice.

"But pretty much alike when they get here," said Ambrose.

"So they be, so they be," chorussed the other three.

The husks and dust of the corn-sheaves gathered thickly on everything as the blazing heat of the midday hours passed over the field. The firkins of beer were emptied, and still the dusty skins, parched throats, and bloodshot eyes of the labourers called for more.

"Here's the drinkings, praise be!" said Prust at length, as the fragrance of hot tea and the scent of saffron cakes became perceptible along the lane outside the field.

The boy who had wheeled up the cans sat on a corn-sheaf grinning at the men's talk as they stretched out in the shadow of the loaded wagon, wielding clasp knives over the great flat drinking cakes. Old Prust still lovingly dandled his beer firkin; the tea he valued as bringing out the sweat, but the beer for joy.

The horses harnessed to the wagon drooped wearily over their nose-bags, and the bright red handkerchiefs of the men flamed in the light that caught the steel of the prongs and the metal points of the harness.

"Old mare's got a Devon coat-of-arms," said Bill Crocker, pointing to the broken knees of the near horse, as he tipped up the tea-can and in so doing poured a pint or two over himself.

"As spry as a cow with a musket, Bill, you be," said Prust.

"Anyway," said the horseman huffily, offended at the slight to one of his charges, "her's got the strain of old Jennifer to the making of her."

The other men regarded the old mare with new respect, for Jennifer is the famous horse of the district—the Pretty Polly of North Devon. Her mother was a Spanish jennet saved from a wreck when in foal. Her offspring, thus strangely dropped, saved hundreds of lives by her cleverness in dashing in and out of the surf, so that her rider could help the wrecked. In the end Jennifer became an heiress, for fifty pounds was left her by will, so that she should never fall upon evil days, and her descendants, however jaded and wind-broken, have a reputation still.

"Hark to the ground say!" said Prust suddenly

All held cans and cakes suspended while the awesome roll of the pebbles on the beaches below came up like the muffled beating of drums.

"Look there!" called the boy, who had climbed on to the half-loaded wagon. Following the direction of his outstretched finger the men gazed seaward.

Light puffs of mist, like smoke-wreaths from an unseen fire, were blowing inland from the sea, coming every instant thicker and thicker. The mist curtains had dropped over Lundy and the Welsh coast; but silver points of light still flickered here and there on the sea. Westward the coast-line was blotted out, while they watched the smoke-drifts gather, apparently driving hot blasts of air before them. Still, dun fingers worked on cliff and field till Hartland Quay was gone and a lowering cloud of November fog took its place.

"It comes with a breath and goes with another," said Michael solemnly.

"Best get on with this load before it catches us," said Ambrose, leaping up.

Suddenly all the clatter ceased, and old Prust muttered, "The ground say didn't speak for nort." Then a reverberating sound, like minute guns, came from the coastguard station at Hartland.

> "From Padstow Point to Hartland Light,
> A watery grave by day and night,"

said Michael.

By the time the load was carried a man could scarce see his hand before his face, and the men walked back to the barn at Blegberry in a thick, reddish haze that magnified the size of everything till it seemed grotesque.

Up in the rough rafters of the barn bright pigeon eyes peeped at the group of men settled in the hay. There came a sleepy "rookety coo" from time to time, and a feather, soft and silvery, would drop from a well-preened wing. The mist filled the shadowy corners and hid the outlines of the carts at the far end, while over the half-open doorway the world apparently ceased in the thick wool of fog.

Michael Prust, the conversationalist of the party, felt the influences of time and place; he became reminiscent.

"Us shan't carr' that field to-day," said Crocker.

"'Twas laid down as us shouldn't," said Michael. "Same as all things be laid down."

His voice sounded dreamy, and the sleepy fingers of the dense quiet, combined with tobacco, began to lull everybody into a dream. The farmer himself was away, so that further activity than waiting seemed uncalled for.

"I followed the sea first 'long," said Prust, "till I married Susan and come to live here. I was mate of the *Unity* to Brixham, and Susan's sister was married to the skipper of her. That's how I got Susan. 'Twas all through being laid down for us."

"Drive on, Michael," said Abraham Ridd; "you'm pretty nigh as long getting to it as the donkey was when they walked with a carrot two inches off his nose."

"The *Unity* put out 'pon a fair wind of a Tuesday morning," said Prust, his voice beginning to drone like the rhythm of a chanty. "Us didn't mean to be out long, for skipper's missus, my Susan's sister, was near her lying-in, and skipper'd got her on his mind; but come Tuesday night the wind shifted sudden, and there wasn't a chance of us getting in for hours. I dunno how it come about, but I reckon the old man lost his nerve. Anyway, there was something wrong aloft, and the skipper went up, and come down quicker than he meant, with his shoulder out and the wind against our getting back.

"We carried 'en below and there a lay. And 'twas Friday night afore us got 'en to a doctor, and his collar bone broke, too, as they found after.

"' 'Tis like a circle,' said he, 'there'll be no getting out of it till there's been more trouble. Somebody's been ill-wishing us.' And I knowed he was thinking 'pon the missus. But the two of us that was left did our best to work the boat and keep 'en up. There was but cocoa for 'en to drink, and by Friday the *Unity* made the bay. Never had I been so glad afore to pass the old Hob's nose. 'Twas coming in darkish and the shore-lights began to start. The skipper's little house looks out right over the bay, and most the first lights o' Brixham that you see is from their windows. That's what I was looking for, and then I seed 'em, two little points of yellow from the cliffs. Now I'd seen one light scores o' times, but now they'd a light upstairs and down. Then I went below.

"'Jim,' says I, 'there's two lights up home-along.'

" 'Then the cheeld's come,' saith he; 'for I told 'em to put a light in the parlour if 'twas so afore I got in.'

"I signalled for help the minute I could, and they got 'en up to hospital. I left 'en patching him up, whilst I stepped along quick to get the news about 'en up home along.

" 'Twas a bit dim in the passage, and afore I'd well shut to the door behind me there was a bundle shoved into my arms without so much as a by-your-leave, and most o' Susan followed it. I'm the same height as the skipper, and Susan took me for 'en.

" 'Here's a present for 'ee, Jim,' says she, 'the big boy you've been wanting so.' They'd had but little maids afore. Then her called out, for her'd found her mistake. Now, I'm timid mostly, but that night, with the bustle I'd been in for days, I'd ha' kissed a boat-load of girls as easy as winked. So I just held tight to her and the bundle, and says I—

" 'But where's my present, Susan?' And somehow her give it to me."

Ambrose watched Prust's sea-blue eyes grow misty, like the steely surface of the sea when the grey mist touches it with fairy fingers, for Susan and Michael were beautiful lovers still.

Ambrose was silent in wonder, for this rough man had found beauty in a human relationship that he himself knew, as yet, but by the pulsing of the blood.

Suddenly they all started to their feet.

"Hark, what's that?" said one.

Muffled by the layers of mist there came the rush of horses' hoofs and the shouts of men.

"A ship ashore in the fog betwixt Damehole and Berry!" shouted a coastguardsman, as they hurried to the door of the yard.

"Come on, soce!" yelled Michael, starting off towards the sea. "I know the spot where it'll be."

Into the peaceful dreaminess of sleepy talk there came like an avalanche the rush of intense excitement as, guided by Michael who knew the cliffs better than the coastguard, they leapt the low field walls and plunged amid gorse and heather down the steep sides of the valley, till they reached a spot whence they could clearly hear the waves breaking below.

"Here, mates!" shouted Prust to the coastguard, who were wandering like dogs on a false scent.

Ambrose stood behind him, looking down on the dim outline of a vessel that seemed directly under the overhanging brow of the cliff, though in reality it was several yards out. Through the blanket of fog there came up to them the sound of hoarse cries in some foreign tongue that sounded like furious quarrelling.

"Here," shouted Michael to Bombie, the chief coastguardsman, "down over the cliff 'tis for 'ee. I'll give 'ee a lead, and mind your footing. 'Tis pretty nigh like the side of a house."

On hands and knees and clinging to every foothold in the almost nocturnal darkness, the men dropped over the cliff edge. Ambrose moved forward with his tongue clinging to the roof of his mouth; then he stood still suddenly, like one with poison creeping slowly through his veins. Below he could see the deck of the strange ship right beneath his feet. Then, as he peered downward, the mist wavered for a second, and he saw the leaden waves licking the rocks with curling, hungry tongues. The sea was snarling, green and livid, above its rocky bed. He turned sick as at the sight of a hideous upheaval of human vileness, and as the mist covered his hair with a thick coating of tiny drops, the clammy sweat burst out from every pore of his body.

He lay face downwards towards the cliff-edge, peeping into the cauldron of vapour with the snarling, coiling tongue of green and livid spume below. Shouts came up, and he could hear Bombie yell—

"You must clear out. Tide turns in half an hour, and the ship's breaking up!"

"A chap with a chest like a hogshead," thought Ambrose, trying to pour contempt on a man who had done so easily what he himself could not. It seemed like an evil dream, from the first coming of the mist fingers to the time that there leapt at him from the cliff this revelation of his own fear. Why had he been unable to fling himself down the unseen path to the licking waters below?

Ambrose slunk away unnoticed, when heads began once more to appear on the cliff side, but he knew what was happening from the sounds. The crew, French apparently, were drunk, but ultimately each man of them appeared, clasping fondly a jar of liquor and supported by coastguardsmen.

"Stark mutiny and worse," fumed Bombie. "First thing I tumbled upon was a pack of cards upon deck and the mate asleep by 'em."

A man lay down close to young Velly's feet and began sucking at the jar he carried, while Bombie aimed a kick at the sneering face.

By the time the fog had lifted, twenty-three men were camping out in the barns at Blegberry, but Ambrose still lay cold and stiff at the edge of the cliff; over and over again he saw the same scene; man after man climbing down where he dared not go. Old Prust's tale of bewitchment, of the circle of trouble, occurred to his mind as an explanation of this sudden powerlessness that had come upon him.

But he knew very well that, after all, it came from within; since for every power that a man possesses he pays toll in a corresponding weakness, and straightforwardness is only too apt to go with hardness, and power of thought with incapacity for action. Probably the artist pays the heaviest toll of all; for from his vivid realisation of pain and joy there spring that tendency to shrink from danger that we call cowardice, and that egotistic pursuit of sensuous joys that we call sensuality. Ambrose lay for a long time face to face with the unknown depths of moral weakness that he suspected now to be his inheritance. For to a lad born within sight of the cliffs, the fear of that dangling journey between land and sea is shame inexpressible.

The tide was turning now and the mist rising, when Ambrose perceived a knot of men hurrying up the slope of Smoothlands, carrying ropes and an iron stanchion. Instinct drove him after them till he stood at the edge of the cliff looking down on the strata that curved into a series of semicircles, forming the entrance to a cave that echoed with the imprisoned tide.

"The cowardly hounds!" said a man at his elbow.

"What is it?" asked Ambrose.

"Left a man's body behind and never said so. Fell overboard when she struck, and a lad says he's been carried into the wash of the old cave."

Ambrose watched the men drive the stanchion into the ground, for from this the line was to hang by which a coastguardsman would descend the cliff. As he kicked off his shoes a blindness descended upon him, but his will conquered and he pushed his way forward, dragging slow feet, with the sweat drops on his skin.

"I'll go down over," he said in an unnaturally loud voice. "I'm lightest weight."

"Better way let a trained man go," said Bombie doubtfully. "Do 'ee know where to look for 'en? I doubt but you'll make a mull of it."

"I'm damned if I will," said Ambrose, getting warmer as he felt the eyes of the ring of men fixed on him. The next moment he could have struck the coastguardsman for taking the offer without any expression of astonishment. The man's red cheeks, suffused with blood, his strained and puffy eyes, his great trunk were revolting to the lad.

"A pottle-bellied ass," said Ambrose, talking to himself. But Bombie took no notice, and merely adjusted the rope.

The first step over cliff edge would be like a leap into eternity, but Ambrose felt it was far off yet. It would not come till ages had passed, and he must live in the fear of it. The next moment it came suddenly, as a thing leaping out of the darkness, and he was at the verge, noting as a strange phenomenon the quivering of the sea-thrift along the edge of the cliff in the wind that blew inland. He paused for a moment to compare this incessant shiver with the stillness of the grasses on the flat surface of the cliff. Then there came, from very far off, a shout—and he stepped into nothingness, feeling only the sickening strain of the rope under his weight. He wondered vaguely that it should bear him at all, but he was more interested in the grey beards of lichen that he saw as he passed downwards, hand over hand. Then from the lichen beards he went on to think of Speke's Mouth Waterfall, for he knew that if one gazed long enough at the falling sheet of water there, the still cliffs on each side seemed, when one turned one's eyes on them, to be gliding upwards. They were, he noted, doing so now, like black polished slugs.

As he watched his clasping hands and his springing muscles a sense of elation came, and in the stillness he shouted to the waters and the sea wind. At this moment of mastery he tasted the supreme bliss of life—the conquest of the will over those inner powers that threaten so often to betray us, the cowardice, lust, or rage that makes us slaves. With this joy came the most vivid picture he had ever seen: the sanctuary ring in Hartland Church; for the hunted criminal in himself was saved. The next instant his feet touched the foot of the cliff and the waves caught his legs with a rush of spray.

And brought a new shuddering: the picture of the grey pebbles in the pools that the tide left between the two walls of rock; so would look a dead face, livid, iron-grey.

The next moment, churning in the sickening thud, thud of the breakers, he had seen it—the quiet face, the hair just stirring in the suck of the water, the partially clothed limbs.

At the sight his fear was gone, for the dead face was no more terrible than the eyes of the old sheep-dog at Long Furlong; he had looked in the face of the King of Shadows, and lo! there was no more shuddering in it than in the sun at noonday. With a thankful laugh he proceeded with his task, the fastening of the body to the rope.

His own ascent was made as lightly as any sailor lad could have done it. The gleam of the bird's-foot trefoil below his hands as he clutched the slippery grass on the summit was the loveliest thing his eyes had ever lighted on; below, the dankness of weed, the lapping of waves on black, jagged ridges; above, the gold of trefoil, the scent of heather-honey, peace and safety and—mastery.

It was the moment of moments; for satisfied desire is often bitter in the after-draught, but by the conquest of our weakness we become as gods.

As they bore the body of the French sailor up to Blegberry, Ambrose felt that extraordinary powers of observation were his just now; he seemed to have got down to the bones of things, to the beating heart of everything he saw. A frenzy possessed him to draw the stark form and the battered head over which some fool had thrown a coat.

Bombie, a savage, laughed Ambrose to himself; he himself was the bold savage now, for he lusted to draw a dead man.

When they were opposite the old stone well-house of Blegberry, Ambrose saw the dead flowers of every "penny-pie" that grew in the interstices of the stone as he had never noticed them before, even when he made a sketch of the well. The iron dipper with the hole in it had been mischievously thrown into the middle of the road, and one of the bearers kicked it aside as Ambrose walked in the procession.

Suddenly his eye fell on the protruding feet of the man they carried; there was a darn, in some lighter wool, on the rough blue sock, a darn perhaps made by a woman's hand.

At the pity of it, the men and the well faded, and he heard some one call out—

"Hullo, hold up! what's this?"

A minute later there came the cold splash of water in his face, and he found himself lying on the road with his head on a blue-jerseyed arm.

"Turned 'ee a bit sickish, did it?" said Michael Prust philosophically; "you've got your mother's milk still in 'ee, my sonny."

But Ambrose wondered dully how the water had been dipped from the well in a dipper that had no bottom to it. Then he raged at the thought that a man who had just been over cliff should be associated with mother's milk. He got up hastily with the sensation of having fallen off a pedestal.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAW OF LIFE

THE next morning Damaris Westaway stood looking down on the sheltered cove, east of Hartland Point, that is called Shipload Bay. The sea was gleaming in pools of rose-red shadow, that broadened here and there into glittering mirrors of steel-blue as the sun emerged from a smouldering bank of cloud mountains. Broader the light grew and more vivid, till the eyes ached with the reflection of it.

Dancing in the foam at the line where the breakers seethed there was one human figure. Seen from the cliffs above as it ran across the sand, it seemed to be racing the cloud shapes that threw their shadow on the sea. Coming down the cliff path, Damaris watched the pinkish figure dancing by the side of its hard, black shadow, and when she reached the sand she could hear the sound of singing in a clear, half-boyish soprano. There seemed to be no words, but the harmony of voice and sea and wind was complete, for it was the wordless hour of joy that knows no thought, no fear of the future, no after-taste of the past.

Damaris knew the singer very well, for Thyrza Braund had been quite the best dancer in the class that she had conducted during the winter. Thyrza also possessed an additional interest as forming part of the Velly household; there was even in the freshness of her simplicity something of the charm that radiated from Ambrose himself, for bc were frankly in love with themselves—Ambrose with l brain, Thyrza with her body.

"It is sweet to lie in the sun"; such was the sum tot of Thyrza Braund's philosophy, and the only differen between her outlook and that of a little animal was th she was sensitive to more kinds of sunshine than the anim She loved nothing savagely or greedily, but all pleasa things sanely. The perfection of her own body gave h the sense of being at home in the world; she set her tee in the bread and cream and licked her lips after it as merri as the most immoral cat that ever roved a dairy; she p her lips to the cider as a bee might have rifled a clove head. In summer lands she would have sucked the purp grape-skins dry with the pouting lips of a Hebe, as a moth would have taken the same pleasure in her little ones a hen with downy ducklings. All unkindness was forei to her nature, for she basked even more happily in huma sunshine than in physical. The crystal clearness of h simple heart was an instinctive appeal to "Mother Damaris who felt about such human butterflies as this what Luth felt when he watched his little Magdalen venturing alo into the unknown universe that waits on the other side death; for the big world is a strange place for little souls wander in.

At last Damaris called to her—

"Thyrza, Thyrza Braund!"

The girl started, glancing seaward and landward an skyward, as if doubtful whether the voice were of earth heaven. Then she laughed.

"Why, Miss Damaris, I never knew there was a sou near," she said.

She was not painfully embarrassed, for she danced up th beach on bare toes, splashing through all the pools, an singing to herself. As she came nearer Damaris could distinguish the words:—

"I've got one lover and I don't want two."

Damaris frowned, for her own sentiment, in view of the waves and wind, had been rather.—

"Holy, Holy, Holy.

"Why, Thyrza," she said, "you're quite mad to-day. And how is it you're out like this?"

"I done up all my work, and I wasn't well yesterday," said the girl shyly, "so Mrs. Velly sent me out."

Damaris glanced for a second at the angry red and white ripple marks that scarred Thyrza's neck, for she was slightly marked with the king's evil. Catching her eye, the girl covered her neck with her hands, exclaiming—

"I'm spoilt with this. I always feel it's there; and I get to mind it more and more as I grow older."

"But you have always had it, so that it's nothing new to you. Why should you care more about it now?"

"Because there's somebody that I like—like—like very much. And I thought he'd hate me for it. I wanted to be clean and whole for 'en," she whispered as she began to dress.

Damaris understood, for her chief gift was a certain power of projecting herself into the lives of others. Even now, in the sore trouble of her thoughts about her father and his changing life, she was able to live with Thyrza for a few minutes.

"Yes," she said slowly, "one would wish to be perfect for the man one loves. But, Thyrza, you must always remember that a stain on our hearts hurts those we love far more than a bodily blemish could do."

In awe at this serious tone, Thyrza looked up from her task of fastening her shoes.

"Why am I marked same as this?" she asked.

" 'Tis for your forefathers' faults, they say."

"But what have I done to have they forefathers?"

"Ah, Thyrza, that's the riddle of the world. If we could answer that, we should know all about ourselves."

"But it wasn't his forefathers that brought all this trouble on poor John Darracott," cried Thyrza, rushing into the trouble that was constantly recurring to her mind. "Oh, they speak shameful of 'en. They say he told a lie when he swore he was on the look-out that night. But it isn't true, for I know 'en better than that comes to. And he's going to get the sack, they say; and there's nobody to throw 'en a good word, and he never speaks to anybody now."

So this, thought Damaris, was the secret of the distress at the marred neck.

"Never mind, Thyrza," she said; "there's going to be a Board of Trade enquiry, and that will probably clear his name."

"And till then he's to bear all their scandalising without a word," said Thyrza, with heaving breast.

"Suppose," said Damaris slowly, "that Darracott's trouble should put an end to a bad system and bring back the old way of watching the coast. Wouldn't it be worth while for him to bear a little cruel gossip?"

"No, it wouldn't. For why should they tell lies about 'en? 'Tis bad enough for 'en to feel the lives gone. My father was a pilot for twenty years, and I know what it would ha' been to him."

"Come here," said Damaris, thinking more of Thyrza than of Darracott, "come and sit by me. I don't know who it is that likes—likes—likes you."

"He doesn't. 'Tis I that likes him. 'Tis maidens after men, these ways, you know," dimpled Thyrza.

"Well, whoever it is, wait and be sure that it's the right one; for if it's the wrong one, he'll spoil you more than ever these marks can do."

"Eh, dear," said Thyrza frankly, "I don't mind men no more'n I do varmints and angle-twitches. They'm all living, and that's enough for me. I like what's alive."

"Yes," said Damaris, "we want the touch of strength that a man can give us. But sometimes we've to wait all our lives for the right touch."

"I shall try and be struck for the marks," said Thyrza, turning Damaris's words to literal account. "They say that if you lay the hand of a dead person on 'em, they'll go."

Tremblingly she thought in a flash of the French sailor whose body lay at Blegberry. "Anyway," she whispered, "they say you'll never have a baby with the marks."

Damaris took the girl's hand, all roughened with work, in her own long, student's hands, thinking, as she did so, of the power of imaginative sympathy shown by the child in her sorrow for Darracott, in her tender thought of motherhood. After all, the root of things was in Thyrza.

"A baby with a neck all lily-white," she said; "that's what you want, is it?"

Thyrza's eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Eh, my Lord," she whispered, "how you know things!"

"Listen, Thyrza. There is more than one way of love. There's instinct; that's of the animals. Women don't know much of that, thank God. Anyway, it's not first with them. Then there's the glory that is all a dream of a few weeks. It passes, but it gives us the things women want, little lips that kiss, little hands that cling."

"That's it," said Thyrza, sobbing. "How did 'ee know—to say it?"

But Damaris did not know; she only dreamt, as women do.

"And," she went on, after a long pause filled by the roar of the wind and the sea and the throbbing of two tender hearts, "there's a third love. The love that is all star-like, that points upwards, that leads to the great heights where the body is not felt, and the child of that love is no puny, crying babe but a great deed that we call divine."

Thyrza looked awe-stricken, then she said timidly, "That's lonesome—and cold," she added.

"And not for you nor me," laughed Damaris.

Somehow Thyrza's face had grown suddenly quiet; nothing of her former joy danced in her eyes.

"The sea's quieter," she said as they climbed up the cliff. "I always know how the sea is, and when there's a storm I'm mad-like. When a maid's like that she bears her children to the flow of tide and goes out with the ebb. I know how the tide is day and night. Even if you was to wake me sudden, I should know."

Damaris looked out to sea and noticed that the mist was closing in over the horizon.

"Mother bore me in a storm," said Thyrza; "and the months afore I came, her was never out of sound of the gulls. I mind her saying that ever so many times."

"Do you believe all that?" asked Damaris.

"'Tis true as the Book," answered Thyrza.

At the top of the cliff they parted, and Damaris turned back towards the village.

Hartland lies several miles inland from the cliffs, a group of low buildings crouching under blackened thatch or grey slate roofs, with little windows set deep in whitewashed walls. The narrow streets look windswept even in bright sunshine. An ancient plane tree leans against the end of Dr. Dayman's house, if anything so prim as a plane tree can be said to lean. The house, with its wide porch and niggard window-spaces, had been the Manor House of the Prust family, in the days when the village was a borough own with a charter dating from the thirteenth century. t is a place of wide light, where the north wind seems to blow perpetually, yet the hydrangea clusters in the gardens, he lemon-scented verbenas and flowering myrtles bear witness to the softness of the sea-wind that blows inland from he echoing cliffs.

At the entrance to the village Damaris met Dr. Dayman, who at sight of her face, dismounted, and holding the bridle under his arm, prepared to walk back with her.

"You don't look," said he, "as if you'd slept very well last night."

"Father told me what you already know," she said, "about what he means to do."

"And it's upset you."

"Dr. Dayman," she said, turning on him angrily, "don't you see that it takes away the only interest in my life, cuts it off clean? For here I had found work to do; I could help, even more than father could, and now there'll be nothing left for me but to keep house for him and see he doesn't catch cold. For I have tried hard to help here. And although it's only a little place, somehow it was a human link. I felt part of a big family."

"Do you know what I call you? Yes, you do quite well, Mother Damaris. I know all you've done. Dozens of girls pulled up, boys turned from louts into humans. I always said that there wasn't anything you'd turn your back on; nothing too low, nothing too dirty for Mother Damaris to handle, God bless her!"

The doctor lifted his hat, as he was wont to do at his own lyrical passages.

"It'll all be over in a few short months, I suppose," said Damaris; "for, disguise the fact as you will, a woman is a man's shadow, her husband's, her father's. I've no work to do because I'm Damaris Westaway. Only I was given a little because I was my father's daughter. Look at Caroline Herschel, washing dishes while her brothers swept the heavens with their telescopes, and she with longings as keen as theirs."

The girl had been very lonely, for her scholarly training had unfitted her for friendship with the country girls of her own class, and with all the force of her nature she longed to do what she called "the real things," to be in at the doing of tangible tasks. True, she wrote notes and corrected references for her father, but she had more instinct for the practical than the scholarly life. She had found, therefore, intense happiness in the nursing Dr. Dayman often gave her to do, in the mental healing she was sometimes able to bring. Although she was honest enough to know that her father was only doing the straight thing in leaving the Church, yet the blow had opened her eyes to her dependent position.

With eyes that looked straight ahead she poured out her sorrows to Dr. Dayman, as frankly as in her childish days she had confided to him the broken toys that he used to mend for her.

"It isn't a case of father and me only. It's the case of one sex and another," she said.

"And one generation and another," said Dr. Dayman quietly.

"Perhaps so. Father and I love each other dearly. But it's the way life treats us women, that's where the trouble lies."

"Yes; you've no *locus standi*, that's the trouble of it," said Dr. Dayman.

"I have been educated to think; but here I am going to be left with nothing to think about, except to cultivate my own miserable talents, which is like breathing in a bell-glass where there is no communication with the outer air. We're always being pruned, we women. Long ago they pruned our morals and mutilated our hearts by ignorance and seclusion, in order that we might be chaste, that we might bear children honestly. They only made us petty. They couldn't make us chaste that way, not chaste with the chastity of real passion that keeps pure for love's dear sake. But, forgive me, Dr. Dayman, for ramping on a platform."

"Gad, Damaris, keep it up," said the doctor, counting an ebullition of rage a first-class feminine febrifuge.

"Now they prune us mentally," she continued. "Oh, yes, they give us books and toys and bid us play happily in our nurseries, the schools and colleges that lead nowhere. But we want our share in the direction of the world; we want to train our powers of judgment and responsibility exactly as men train theirs—by using them. Why, even the grocer in a back street has his vision above the price of raisins, his vision of a greater people to be, if it's only that they'll get better water from the improved town-pump. But we women have to be contented with the kitchen water-tap. We mustn't meddle with the town-pump."

"Do you know," said Dr. Dayman, "that even now you're being tested in your powers of sharing in the common life—and you're failing? Would it be well for your father to hold office in an organisation that he no longer believes in—even to satisfy his daughter's craving for helping lame dogs over stiles?"

It was a blow between the eyes, but Damaris was made of the finer stuff that can take blows.

"You're right," she said after a long silence. "But I'm so miserable. Tell me what I'm to do."

"Put out of your mind what's going to happen to you next month or next year, and wait quietly, for wherever you're blown you'll make a niche for yourself. There may be going to be greater changes than you think," he said, remembering that the upheaval in Mr. Westaway's life was not merely religious.

"I'll try," said Damaris humbly. "But almost worse to bear of all is the thought of what hard things will be said of father."

"That kind of thing," said Dr. Dayman, "evil speaking, lying and slandering, is largely a matter of class; for the lower the breed, the more savagely the human birds peck a wounded mate."

Like Thyrza, Dr. Dayman's thoughts often turned to John Darracott, for, unlike Thyrza, he wished the man would leave the neighbourhood instead of persisting in the struggle against calumny.

That evening Darracott sat in his room, with his head leaning forward on his breast, going over and over again the same round of thoughts, the same hopeless speculations as to what might have been done had he been at the rocket-house. He counted much on the fact that it would have taken at least an hour and a half to get the men together at Smoothlands, and in all probability the actual wreck was a matter of a few minutes.

It was nerve-shaking to him, in the wall of isolation that had grown around him, to hear a low tapping on his door. He glanced round the room before he went to open it, feeling ashamed of the table piled high with dirty plates, and of the grate thick in layers of ashes.

On the doorstep stood Thyrza, her breath catching painfully from nervousness. Three times, indeed, she had walked up and down outside the house before venturing to knock. But one glance at Darracott's face brought her the pluck that rarely fails a woman in desperate straits, her own, or another's.

"I haven't seen 'ee for so long, Mr. Darracott," she said calmly, "that I thought you must be ill. May I come in?"

"Surely," said John, the sound of his own voice echoing strangely in his ears. He was still working at the farm, but from his master he heard nothing now but a few curt words that required no answer.

Thyrza was glad when the roar of the waves outside was deadened by the closing of the door. She understood how it must ring in Darracott's ears when she noticed how he started at the shriek of the gulls overhead, for his nerves were quivering like those of a horse that has been flogged.

"It's queer to think I've never been here before," she said; "but, dear me, you do show you're a bachelor man. Now, I'm going to wash up some of your things for you," she continued, turning up the sleeves of her dress, and giving him a little shove towards the steaming kettle.

" 'Tis day of judgment like enough," she said to herself, "to have him grizzling like that, leave alone seeing his room in such a muck. And before I leave I'll have his room ship-shape, and that look out of his face. That I will, if I stay here all night."

Suddenly Darracott threw down the tea-cloth she had thrust into his hand.

"No, no, my dear," he said, "it won't do. You meant kind by coming, but 'tis getting darkish, and you mustn't stay no longer."

"John," she said, looking up at him in the darkening room that somehow gave her greater courage, "night and day I couldn't get 'ee out of my mind. So I couldn't bide away no longer, for you're in sore trouble, John."

In the repetition of his name she felt herself calling to be admitted to the depths of his sorrow; he should not be alone down there, she said, repeating it to herself again and again with the faith that moves mountains.

His ice-bound heart moved for a second, thrilling in the warm beam of her words and looks.

"My dear," he said gently, "you oughtn't to ha' come; for you're a maid with a good name to lose, and you might ha' been seen coming here. What's to be borne, I can bear."

"Listen to me," she said, holding his arms and stretching a-tip-toe in the effort to comfort; "do you think that because I'm a maid, I'll let 'ee bear trouble alone? Let me help, let me help, John. I want to say things to 'ee, for I can't bear to see they hard eyes, John—hard, hopeless eyes."

"My dear, my dear, what do 'ee want?" he asked, as he felt her sobs go through him. "'Tisn't as if you cared for me. Thank God, you don't as 'tis," he said, loosening her hands.

"Why?" she asked sharply, standing very upright in the middle of the room, and stamping her foot. "What's all this fuss about? I know everything that there is to know. The *Flying Foam* wasn't even seaworthy, jibs all wrong and head sails worse. And for all a body can tell, with no signals aboard to send up. What's all that got to do with you? The lying devils to take away a man's name same as this is! And you, too, to sit down and bear it like this! I'm ashamed of you, John Darracott; and I'm glad, I'm glad, you and me's not keeping company. There," she cried, stamping her foot again; "you're a poor spirited thing, a regular toad under a harrow. And I'm sorry I come here to-night, that I be."

She burst into an agony of tears.

"Thyrza," said Darracott, in a tone that stopped her sobbing, "do you know what 'tis they say about me?"

"Yes," she whispered; "they say you wasn't there."

"And it's true what they say," he answered; "it's quite true. I lay across that there table and slept—and outside——"

He made a gesture toward the heaving sea below, and was silent.

Thyrza had often stood by men when they do the work that tests their manhood; she understood in an instant what this confession must mean to him. But in a flash her pity pierced to the heart of his agony.

"Oh, John," she said, pushing him into a chair, and thrusting herself into his arms in a hard, fierce eagerness to comfort; "John, John, you must ha' been worn out!"

"But nothing'll ever bring back they lives, nothing'll make me the same as I was before that night," he said, while he held her close in the mere comfort of humanity that shared the pain.

"But," she said in low tones, "I don't believe but what you'll be allowed some day to pay it back. John, some day you'll pay it back."

"You thought of that too, Thyrza. And so did I. Ay, though you don't love me, us think the same thoughts."

"And you didn't know what you was doing." She knew well what the weariness of a field labourer can be.

For a moment he thought of telling her the part she had played in his failure, for in the relief of partial confession he saw how a full confession would comfort. Then he rejected the idea of shadowing her brightness with such an idea, and in the rejection of this temptation there blew on his heart the first faint breath of returning self-respect.

"I slept like a log," he said evasively. "But you don't shrink from me, and that's something. Thyrza, you'd feel it more if you loved me, wouldn't 'ee, my dear?"

She was silent, but they both knew it to be true. Then he got up and gently put her down.

"John," she said hesitatingly, "hadn't 'ee better say it out open to everybody, same as you have to me?"

"'Tisn't in me to do it, not after what I swore. No mortal man could do it."

"And I've done no good by coming," she said sadly, as he opened the door.

Shutting it once more, he came back and, putting his hands on her shoulders, looked down into her eyes.

"Thyrza," he said steadily, "you've done more than ever I could tell 'ee. When you knocked at the door I was thinking there was but one way for me. But I know now that death's cowardice. I've got to bide on, till the time comes when I can do what you said."

"Pay back," she whispered.

"Iss, lass; pay back."

The half-latched door burst open, and as the waves sounded nearer, he said, "There'll come a way if only I bide long enough."

In that moment there came to them both from the sea the clear call of things high and hard, the things that the struggle with nature has always called for, the great renunciations that no history records, for they are written only in the annals of lives which end in unmarked graves.

"John," whispered Thyrza, "will 'ee give me the box you made for me?"

It was in her hand as they walked along the road to Long Furlong.

Earlier in the evening Ambrose Velly sat drawing in the farm kitchen. There was a certain savagery about the great slashing strokes with which he worked, till at length he tore the paper. With a half-oath he seized another sheet, flinging the first on the floor by his side.

The night was still, and a faint murmur of the distant sea crooned in at the open doorway. Suddenly a branch of wood, hissing in the embers, gave out a ripping sound, and in the nerve-tension of the moment, Ambrose started. Then he flung down his charcoal and laid his head on his hands. He could see the ring of sunburnt faces, the outstretched figure of the French sailor in their midst.

But what he saw was not on the paper, for his hand refused obedience. Slowly he tore the second sheet across and began laboriously to draw the well-house at Blegberry. The drawing was a model of accurate memory-work, and the completion of it a bitter exercise in self-humiliation, for, like a man who has set out to conceive a design of traceried arches, he ended by building a four-square pigsty.

Leaving his drawing on the table, at last Ambrose went out of the house, ostensibly to stretch his limbs, really to find Thyrza. For he had only begun to value the girl's adoration now that it was beginning to fail him. To-night she had left the house without a word, and for days she had scarcely noticed Ambrose's presence.

When he saw the two figures of Darracott and Thyrza drawing near the farm, the reason of it all flashed through him; she had gone to meet Darracott, perhaps even to visit him. In a white heat of rage he made as if to pass the two, but Thyrza would not have it.

"Ambrose," she called, "Mr. Darracott wouldn t have me come back alone; but you'll see me safe home, won't you?"

"Don't let me spoil sport," said Ambrose. "He must have a great deal to talk to you about just now. Of that I make no doubt," he finished with a sneer.

Darracott stood silent while the other's jibes rained about his ears. Then he turned on his heel, and with a brief "Good night," was gone.

Thyrza stood watching his retreating figure for a long while, then she turned on Ambrose.

"I didn't think you were mean before," she said, walking down the road to Long Furlong. The shrinking look on Darracott's face had effaced the memory of the high thought they had shared together, and she felt furious with Ambrose for the bitter shadow he had thrown over her evening.

"I should think," said Ambrose, as he followed, "that you might know better than to be seen with that fellow. Anyhow, he ought to have more decency than to let you speak to him."

"And why shouldn't I speak to him?" she asked, stopping and turning on him.

As she did so he caught sight of the box in her hand, and snatching it from her, opened it. When he looked from the hedge-sparrow's eggs to her eyes, he knew why they had been placed there. With an oath he crushed the shells in his hand and flung them across the road. The box would have followed, had not Thyrza wrested it from him in time.

Suddenly in a flood of memory there came to Ambrose the thought that he had in his hand a weapon that would destroy Darracott's chance with Thyrza for ever. He knew the truth about the *Flying Foam* and Darracott's unkept watch. Thyrza would never give the man a second thought if she knew the facts.

Ambrose walked on while the battle raged in him. But, after a moment, the danger to Darracott was past, for he could not rack the poor wretch any more. It was as impossible to do it as to give the hunted hare to the mercy of the dogs.

But Thyrza had read in his face the love she had so often longed to rouse. With a heart beating to a suffocating measure she walked by his side, while the fleecy clouds overhead raced faster than her own pulses in the rhythmic swell of life that was thrilling to-night. To Ambrose there seemed to be danger somewhere, till in the mental turmoil, partly jealousy and partly something to which he could give no name, a solid band began to compress his forehead.

Then he heard a quick breath by his side, that no stress of Thyrza's will power could restrain.

"Thyrza," he said hoarsely, "Thyrza."

As he stood still he saw the girl's figure sway.

"Did you go to see Darracott to-night?" he asked at last.

"Iss, Ambrose."

"To his house?"

"Iss, Ambrose. 'Twas that I thought night and day about 'en and his trouble. For, oh, my heavens, he's the only one that cares for me in all the world!"

She was sobbing bitterly.

"Thyrza, come here."

Then, as he held out his arms to her, all the supports of will within seemed to give way. Yet falling, as it seemed, into an abyss, he still held her close. In a flash he saw the two sides of his life, the struggle to be an artist, to win up, to make a way that no one else could make for him—and this, that cooed on his heart, half a thing of flame and half of tenderness. Shoals and shallows it might mean; that he knew quite well, yet he stooped his lips to hers and all the world vanished.

"I've loved 'ee all the time," whispered Thyrza, "but you never give me a sign, and then I thought I'd sent away the one man that loved me."

He laughed joyfully, as he whispered—

"But now you know there's another. Which of us is the one you love, Thyrza?"

"You know," she said, slipping her hand into his with a sigh of content.

“Dear little soul,” he answered, “you’ve wound round my heart every way. We’re almost of the same flesh and blood, for your ancestors and mine sleep together in the dear old Devon earth, where you and I’ll sleep together years hence, Thyrza.”

What happiness he could give her, he reflected, laughing to himself. He only wished it were possible to make a whole armful of women happy, for if ever a man felt a benefactor to the entire race of women that night, it was Ambrose Velly.

“You couldn’t live without me, could you, Thyrza?” he whispered as they said good night. “Say it now. Say, ‘I couldn’t live without you, Ambrose.’”

“Oh, I couldn’t. That’s true enough,” she answered. “But I was afraid somebody had told ’ee of this.”

She touched the high neck of her dress.

“Did ’ee know I was marked, Ambrose?” she asked.

He pulled her to him and pressed his lips to the neck that troubled her so.

“Ambrose,” she said, “I do hate what takes ’ee away from me. You’re forever drawing and reading. You don’ love me like I do you.”

“Thyrza,” he answered gravely, “don’t you know tha if a man’s worth anything he must put his work first? He’s no man, else.”

She understood this of Darracott’s work, for with a beloved woman waiting for him, she knew that the man worth loving would go to his death, if the sea called for sacrifice. But Ambrose’s work was so different; for, like Mrs. Velly, Thyrza considered architecture, apart from the mere question of shelter, as scarcely a dignified occupation for a grown man, and when she thought of sculpture she always remembered the Italian men who bring round baskets of “images” for sale.

Two men that night sat reading the first law of life, which is written: "That ye bear much fruit." Darracott dreamt simply of the price paid for other human lives, where Ambrose saw the fair children of his brain rising, stone above stone, into the sunlight, but they both understood more than Thyrza. Yet she, too, had set out on the long road which begins with the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And since Edenic days the way to the tree of life runs past the tree of knowledge.

CHAPTER VII

THE WANDERING GLEAM

THE following day Ambrose and Mr. Westaway were to visit that city of many sieges—Exeter. It was practically the first time that the country youth had come in contact with the life of an ancient historic city, for Ambrose had but little knowledge of the western land that was one day to become an inspiration to him, save of his own wild corner. What he saw in Exeter came to him, then, the more vividly for his dreams of what he would see, for racial love has a trick, like other loves, of flourishing most vigorously on short commons.

Behind them, up the wide ridges of Stepcote Hill, where the guns of William of Orange had been dragged, there once stood the town houses of the wool merchants by whose wealth and enterprise the city lived. Now the road was lined with squalid houses, filth-encrusted and teeming with human life. Along West Street, once the outlook tower of the merchants as they watched their ships bringing goods from Spain, from France and the Lowlands, hung torn bedding and drying clothes suspended by ropes from the windows. "Below wall," as it is still called, lay crowded factories, among which Ambrose noticed the firm of Bodley, stove manufacturers. The name carried him back to Long Furlong, to the oven his mother so often bewailed. Beyond gleamed the river, up which the Danes came chanting their deadly "Aoï! Aoï!" to the assault of the water gate.

"What does it make you feel, Ambrose?" asked Mr. Westaway. "What do you see here?"

"That there's so much at the back of it all, so much forgotten, besides what's remembered."

"Look at the want and sorrow and sin," said Mr. Westaway.

"There's a sort of beauty in that, too. Oh, I can't say it, but Danes and merchants and squalling brats, somehow it's life. That's what I like. All of it's fine, even the dirty clothes, and they're alive too, I'll warn," he said with a grin.

"What does it make you want to do?"

"To fight—and win. Same as they did in the past. I want to build, so that when I'm gone, like those others, what I did'll be here."

"Ay, you see straight. You were born for the lesser light."

"What's that, sir?"

"To live for your own purposes. There's another, the greater light, which is to seek not one's own, but to live in the life of others. Just let me tell you something. The saddest thing in all the world is to see the better way and have no power to tread it. Think of those followers of Him who had not where to lay His head, who live in fine houses and fare sumptuously—with this," he pointed to Stepcote Hill—"close by."

There was a silence, for Ambrose knew that something more than his pupil's career was filling the Vicar's mind.

"But you live plainly," stammered Ambrose at last.

"But my simplicity would feed the hungry and clothe the naked. All my life I have had to say, the way that I know is too hard for me."

The breath of a larger emotion reached Ambrose for a second, a bigger passion than even the love of beautiful achievement, the greatest passion of all, the longing to get down to the depths of evil, if so be that we may help, but it produced a distinct sensation of antagonism. The sun was shining, the water flashing, the blood flowing merrily in his veins; such puling as this was monkish anachronism. He hated it, and the hatred was expressed in a slight shrug of the shoulders. A poor wretch in the gutter would move Ambrose to a chance-flung penny, but he would whistle the more loudly after the encounter in order to forget the unpleasantness of it.

Men like Ambrose come into the world trailing no clouds of glory with them. He had never displayed even the usual sentimentality of youth; he never sang in the village choir, nor had he ever feared a hell, the usual signs of sanctity in the British-born boy. Yet neither had he been actively irreligious; for, like a substance enclosed in a waterproof membrane, his mind had simply remained impervious to anything like spiritual influence, and the cult of humanity, of which Mr. Westaway talked, was to him merely curious, a sort of moral squint.

Such men must learn of the earth; there are no great voices for them, either from past tradition or to-day's appeal, there is only the school of the personal struggle of the world for them. Ambrose had but for ladder to the stars a love of seeing others happy and a dislike of causing pain.

He had, in addition, his artistic birthright of sensitiveness to impressions; the sight of a berried autumn hedge against the blue would send his pulses leaping in much the same way as a great heroic act would have done in a soul more spiritual. All the senses, lower as well as higher, were very strong in him, and he was as eager for the joys of the palate as for the pleasures of the eye. Apples, strawberries and asparagus not only delighted him, but made him friendly towards other men who revelled in these good gifts, and Ambrose preferred to share his strawberries with another, because the spectacle of some one else rollicking in earth's fruits gave an additional edge to his own appetite.

Then Mr. Westaway began to tell the story of how the Cornish rebels of the old faith besieged the city, and were repulsed from the west gate by the skill of a miner within the walls, who countermined above the besiegers' mine and flooded it with water from the weavers' vats that poured down Stepcote Hill, much helped by the miraculous intervention of a thunderstorm.

"They were fighting over the Prince of Peace," said Mr. Westaway, "whose words they read to as little purpose as we do to-day."

They went next into a backyard near the water gate, where stood a tiny chapel, with clothes hung out to dry on the very palings of it.

"When I was a boy," said Mr. Westaway, "I had an old uncle who was fond of exploring churches. He brought me here one night and we went in. 'Twas then a bare, whitewashed room, with a pulpit draped in linen, a great clock and a long table. Round the table sat three figures, a gaunt man, an old lady, and a boy. They were conducting evening service, that is, the old man was reading Toplady's sermons aloud. Now, who do you think these were?" asked Mr. Westaway.

"I don't know."

"The last remnant of the Calvinist Independents of the city, the sect of Cromwell and the Ironsides."

"But they were faithful," said Ambrose.

"It was but to lucre, then. For each of these Independents was only waiting for the other to die. Yes, that's what they were waiting for, that the survivor might profit by the endowment of the sect. That's how the burning, fiery zeal of the Ironsides ended in this ever faithful city. But the survivor was trapped, after all; for they found the money couldn't be alienated from a sect, and it went to the Congregationalists, who enjoy it now."

A few minutes later Ambrose pushed open the swing door and entered the Cathedral. It was the first time he had seen a great mediæval building, save in prints and section drawings, and the first idea that struck him was the beauty that lies in cast shadows; the second, a memory of old Sir Henry Wotton's theory that buildings were first circular, because "birds doe build their nests spherically." For this was a forest in stone, thought Ambrose, catching another glimpse of what he had noted in the village church, the enshrining of nature forms in man's handicraft, the wave-ripples of arch-mouldings, the leaves of crockets, the human heads of corbels, the stone buttresses, cliff-like, of church towers. As he watched the faint beams of sunlight that stole through the mist between the fan-vaulting of the roof, like sun-rays falling on forest arches, a great passion of comprehension flushed all the boy's veins, till his limbs trembled with a fever that was almost physical. For here was not a copy of the earth's beauty, but a sublimated essence of it, a suggestion of the characteristic loveliness of every nature form to be found in the temperate zone.

Yet after a time he saw vaguely that this was not all, for here in the dimness was a spirit not present in cliff forms or forest arches. What was it? he asked himself. What was it that this possessed, that those lacked? For a moment he thought it must be strength, remembering the story of Sir Christopher Wren, who, when all the steeples of London were damaged by a hurricane said quietly: "Not St. Dunstan's, I am sure," so confident was he in the four-square strength of his building's walls. "No," said Ambrose to himself, "it could not be strength, for the cliff bastions are the very types of strength."

The next moment he had found the answer, a strange answer to come to such a lad. For here he was face to face with the unseen that is enshrined in all great work, the unseen beauty that lies behind the seen. Every splendid thing that man creates is an altar to the Unknown Loveliness, of which he catches but flying glimpses now and then, here and there, in a woman's face, in the features of a landscape, in a Pisgah vision of thought. For every picture, every statue, every building, is a confession of faith, not in the maker's own powers, but in that ideal beauty which is still unexpressed, when the picture is painted, or the building raised.

So came the first gleam of the spirit to Ambrose, born of joy and beauty, yet never to reach its clear shining, except with the help of pain. For like the earth itself and the race of men, the life of the spirit is born of "shuddering, also, and tears."

Then a boy's voice soared up and up, beyond the vaulting of the roof, beyond the city mist, beyond the stars, out into the vastness of the universe; another gate of joy was opened for Ambrose, the magic gate of sound that rides the winds of passion, as well as the clear cold air of holiness. For this music, unlike the notes of his own fiddle, expressed, not the merry gleam of sunshine, not "the wind among the barley," but the vastness of the world spaces and of man's dreams of his future. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," said the boy's voice, pealing upwards into the unknown.

Gate after gate of the spirit was opening now, as Ambrose lost himself in thought, the greatest thought of the world, the perception of the vastness of the universe that we inhabit, vast both within and without. It is the most awful event, perhaps, in the mind's history, the coming of this consciousness, which makes a man, for a moment, as a god. This place where he sat seemed to Ambrose a temple built in stone for the service of the infinite; it explained the awe of the great rock shapes, the sport of sea and wind, that had been the companions of his boyhood. Ambrose began to fancy that among the angel hosts, of whom the sermon spoke, there must be the creator of this building.

"What good is like to this," thought he, "to build like this?" "Some day," he was saying to himself, as he stepped out into the street, so misty after his own windy land of marsh and moor and sea. It was the gallant "some day" that makes the glory of these great hours of youth, for he had seen the wandering gleam that opens a way to the vistas of the spiritual world.

An hour later Mr. Westaway and Ambrose stood on the hill above the town, looking down on the beautiful place that sleeps in the circle of her hills, with the mist of her chimneys lying over roofs and towers. Far in the distance flashed a silver streak of sea; in the west flamed the sunset, in the east a row of elms was sharply outlined by the intense blue of the sky.

"The secret of life as I have learnt it is this, Ambrose," said Mr. Westaway, "sell all that thou hast and—not necessarily give it to the poor, but give it to the one thing in the world that you want. If it be painting, paint; if heaping up wealth, heap; if helping the helpless, help. But remember that it wants a strong will. For the roadway of life is strewn with the cast-off theories of the young. You know a man gets up on Sunday morning with a great idea that is to change all his ways; but by twelve o'clock on Monday he is doing very much like other people."

"I won't forget," said Ambrose, who just then saw a new earth, if not a new heaven. But at Long Furlong that very evening the old earth was awaiting him; for when we wonder at the spiritual marvels of Gothic architecture, we should bear in mind the monkish life of its designers, if not of its craftsmen, who at any rate contrived in gargoyle and crocket to get in a vast deal of the old earth's mockery of the Sublime and Beautiful. Dr. Dayman, indeed, declared a hundred times that he could feel twitching at his finger-tips the inspiration of a mediæval humourist.

It was a pitch-dark night when Ambrose reached home. After stabling his horse he stood for a moment in the yard before going into the house. It was so still that not a leaf stirred, not a whisper came from the sea; but suddenly circles of yellow light flickered along the lichened garden wall, where the fuchsia bush hung over the heppen stock. As he craned forward round the gateway of the yard he heard the tapping of light heels and saw that the light fell from a lanthorn that Thyrza was carrying. When she had turned the corner into the road, he raced after her, the yellow circles dancing in front of him like a will o' the wisp. The grass and sand of the gutter where he took care to walk were friendly, and gave no hint that she was being followed.

To Thyrza Braund the marks of the king's-evil on her neck were a real sorrow, not, as they would have been to a practical woman, a thing to necessitate high neck-bands, or, to a clever one, a thing to forget. To women of her type the daintiest bodily purity and perfection must be the foundation of well-being; for the world where men fight to win what satisfies the mind was unknown, save where the simplest issues of duty were concerned. It was not the mere ugliness of the scars that distressed her, but their deep-rooted nature; she felt like a cat who, starting with the disposition of a jet-black one, has yet by some ancestral aberration, acquired a brownish tinge. In her intercourse with Darracott she was the inspirer, she met him on the highest levels of his character; but with Ambrose, so richly endowed beside her own poor nature, she felt a sense of strain. So much in him was a sealed book to Thyrza, who regularly fell asleep over a bound volume of the *Quiver* every Sunday afternoon, that, in her love, she felt like a priest who seeks the most perfect creature as an offering to his god, for the body and heart that gave delight to Ambrose must have the spotlessness of the immaculate.

Yet as she walked on to-night, the suffocating beats of her heart almost choked her, and even while she drew near the place of her trial, bent persistently on her task, she was praying that the gods would avert the dreadful moment. For the wormy terrors of physical death, the charnel house horror, could be conquered by nothing save by the power of devotion; there was no spiritual sense to lighten the horror of that grim darkness.

At last, as the wider roads opened in front of them, Ambrose began to see whither she was bound, for over the tops of the hedges cavernous spaces of opal light yawned to left and right, the meeting place of sea and sky. At first he had imagined himself to be playing the Rabelaisian part of eavesdropper at an assignation, but it almost seemed that the scene was set for a tragedy, since it was for Blegberry that they were bound, a spot inevitably tragic just now, because, in the absence of a mortuary, the sailor's body lay here, awaiting interment in the parish churchyard.

Thyrza turned into the quadrangle of farm buildings which stands apart from the house. The dog kennelled on the other side of the road made no sound, for the straw of the courtyard muffled their footsteps.

Strange tremors, like the whirring of a loom, passed from Thyrza to Ambrose, as he watched her in the crepuscular light from the sea, while she struggled to open the door of the barn, lifting firm hands to its heavy iron ring. It was locked, and for a second she stood with hands pressed to her face. Then, lifting her lanthorn with a swing of decision, she ran up the flight of outside steps that led to the hay tallat over the barn.

At last Ambrose dared to steal up the steps in his turn. In the hay-scented stillness within, a shaft of light ran up towards the shadowy roof in a long column of tawny yellow; it came through an opening in the floor, from Thyrza's lanthorn. Lying face downwards with his head peering into the barn below, he could see a ladder down which she must have climbed. In the rafters overhead a bat wheeled in wide circles, beating itself nearer and nearer to the shaft of light that pierced the dimness. Startled pigeons fluttered sleepily, as the rays pierced to their roosting-places, the beams that supported the tallat floor. At the far end of the barn, in the light that radiated like wheel-spokes in the darkness, knelt Thyrza by the side of a trestle table that stood out, bare and startling, in the centre of a cleared space.

The light shone faintly on her features, showing up the mingled dread and desire that fought on them; the dread was evident, but the desire only lay latent for the moment. Then Ambrose saw her moisten the dry lips of great passion, as she tried with trembling fingers to unhook the fastenings of her cloak and the stud at the neck of her blouse. She was evidently afraid to move freely, lest something should awake.

It was a needless fear, thought Ambrose, as he traced the outline that lay below the coarse sheet, the long shape, the rise of the trunk, the feet resting upwards, toes in air, the crossed hands on the breast.

At the hands Thyrza's eyes paused; it was with them that she was concerned. Furtively, and with jerks that marked successive efforts of the will, she slipped her hand beneath the sheet, slowly drawing out the dead man's hand, without disturbing anything else. Then, kneeling suddenly, with sobbing breaths that shook her whole body, she placed the dead hand on her neck, pressing it close against the scars.

It had large, coarse fingers, whose blackened nails lent to it something of the appearance of a claw, and against it the girl's skin shone like semi-transparent porcelain. As the cold struck downwards, from the skin to the blood beneath, the dread passed from her face, leaving only traces of past emotion, like wavemarks in sand, and tiny points of perspiration on forehead and nose. She pressed the hand closer and closer, with the movement of one getting life from another; there was a suggestion of cruelty in the action, like the savage sucking of a starving child.

At the sight the blood leapt torrent-like through Ambrose Velly's veins and, as he jumped to his feet, the noise he made startled the girl. He heard her shudder and start away from the table, and the next moment he leapt down the ladder, crying—

"Thyrza, Thyrza, it's only me, only Ambrose. Darling, darling, don't be frightened!"

"Oh, my good Lord!" she sobbed as he caught her. The long shivers that shook her communicated themselves to him, and they clung together in wavering heart-beats.

"Did 'ee do it for me, for me?" stammered Ambrose. "It's the dead hand you came for. Oh, you dear, you dear!"

He was pressing rough young lips to her face, her hands, in a transport of love and gratified vanity.

"Did you do it for me, my darling; did you risk the dread and steal through the darkness for me? Say it was for me?" he whispered.

"Iss, lad; I couldn't bide blemished when you loved me."

"Oh, Thyrza, I'm not worth the terror you've been in. No man is, but I will be good to 'ee always, dear."

He was ashamed of the light gaiety with which he had taken her love, rating it as an extra pleasure, quite separate from the main current of his interests.

But as he would have kissed her again, she held him away.

"No, no," she cried, "not now. I've got the chill of the dead hand in me. It must work till the marks go."

"Do you really believe they'll go?" he laughed. "Oh, Thyrza, you're a sad goose."

"Oh, I donno, I donno. But they say 'tis certain sure your chillern won't be marked anyway."

In the dead silence they heard their hearts beat, and the sleepy coo-coo of a pigeon above them sounded like an echo from the garden of sleep. In a moment, however, Thyrza went towards the trestle table.

"No," she said, full of the pity of a natural woman towards the dead and the suffering, "I've took from him. You mustn't love me here, for that's an affront to the dead. He lies here to-day, but he'll be in clay to-morrow, with folks' feet treading him down; but you and I have got all the days to come."

Taking the hand that hung stiff, yet lax, from under the sheet, she slipped it back into its former position. Then she pulled from the breast of her blouse a little square of white linen. "See," she said, putting it into Ambrose's hands, "I wanted him to take something with 'en from me. They'm hard to poor strangers, folks be; yet, maybe, he's got them that love 'en somewhere. I'm going to tie that round his poor bruised head."

As Ambrose watched her, a sense of her lovingkindness stole over him. He remembered the tenderness with which she would put down soaked bread for the chicken, or would sit with an ailing young animal in her lap, letting it suck her kindly, warm hands. He began to feel ashamed of his own crude hunger for self-gratification. For he knew instinctively that to Thyrza the love which had arisen between them was guided by forces that are themselves of the noblest, desires which demand their satisfaction as the holiest right of all. While life called in her, he knew that to him she was but a passing joy. Then he dismissed the thought, for was this not, after all, but man and woman?

Taking the fine linen from his hand, she turned back the sheet and did her work, with little sobbing breaths and trembling fingers, that were paid as a debt to the love and pity of the human lot.

"Why do you bother so about your marks?" asked Ambrose, as they walked down the road from Blegberry to Long Furlong.

"I want to be clean, same as others," said Thyrza shortly. He was colder, she fancied, and walked purposely farther apart from her.

"Why, when maids strip for a swim, they point to me," she continued. "Oh, Ambrose, 'tis the sole speck upon me, dear heart. I couldn't bear to cheat 'ee, if 'twas ever so little. I'm all fair else."

The accents of self-humiliation, of devotion, struck out all there was of good in Ambrose's love for her.

"Thyrza, whatever happens, I will always be good to you. Always, dear. For I love it all, every bit of your dear body and your dear soul and your dear heart."

"I wish this night could last forever," she said, as, both young hearts afire with the perfect trust in each other that sees no future that is unlike the present, they crept into the garden. Here they found the house-door open, and just outside it, a burnt-down candle in a pewter candlestick that stood in a flower-bed.

"That's father!" exclaimed Ambrose bitterly.

As they stood for a moment in the dark at the foot of the stairs, Thyrza whispered—

"Yes; he's back."

Her loving eyes were full of pity, as they listened to the dull, heavy sounds from overhead.

All the past flashed over Ambrose; the nights he had waited as a child, trembling in his bed, in fear of the wavering footsteps; the unavailing prayers he had offered to a deaf heaven that father might come home soon, so that they might all go to sleep quietly.

A fire of passionate self-pity surged up in his heart. Had he not himself his father's inability to resist the cravings of a moment's pleasure? This was his inheritance, for he was a Velly, of a dying stock. He sank down despondently on the passage chair, while Thyrza watched him, knowing, for the love that was in her, something of his thoughts, though she simply could not follow them when they concerned themselves with her. For to her simple nature all the glory of the world was expressed in her call to him, in his returning impulse.

At length, from the embers of the kitchen hearth, came two cheery chirps that echoed through the house.

"Oh, the dear," cried Thyrza in a joyful whisper, "the dear of 'en! He's come back, that's the cricket, Ambrose, that's been quiet for weeks."

The cricket had given her courage, it seemed, for suddenly kneeling on the floor, she slipped into his arms, and holding his hands to her breast, whispered, "It'll be all right, for I—love you, and you love me."

To the artist, life is infinitely vivid in all its aspects; round him are things that provoke curiosity, that half reveal their secret and then withdraw; these he would fain know. There are also things that call for direction, for handling; he would fain make, create, work. Above all, there are things that thrill the nerves into a quivering agony of bliss; he must love. Thus in youth the thinker, the creator, the lover in him war for the mastery.

Of this Thyrza, asleep in a blissful ball, with her fingers on the scarred neck, knew nothing, though to Ambrose, sitting softly playing with muted strings, the world was infinitely varied, for in its circle were contained the conception of the world's pain that he had learnt of Mr. Westaway, the love of woman that Thyrza had taught him, and, strangest of all, the wandering gleam that dimly lights the darkness of the spiritual world.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS

SUDDENLY Ambrose noticed that the room where he sat was full of smoke, and that flakes of soot were falling in all directions. Remembering in a flash of sick dread that their insurance against fire had been allowed to lapse, he opened the door into the yard, thus admitting fresh volumes of smoke into the house. From the door of the stable a long tongue of fire leapt in the current of wind that was fanning the smother of smoke into a trail of destruction. There were two valuable horses in the stable, and, as Ambrose ran across the yard, he knew that the loss of them would mean ruin; so it had come, the terror that Mrs. Velly had dreaded for thirty years.

When he pushed against the door he found there was some obstruction in the way. As he hastily stooped, with his left arm pressed across his face to keep the smoke from his eyes, he came upon the body of a man stretched on the floor. The terrified snorts of the horses reached him through the smoke, as he pulled his father out of the reeking place. In the next second he had rushed back, unfastened the terrified creatures, and driven them out into the yard, where they stampeded wildly for the open gateway, and awoke Caleb by the thundering of their hoofs as they passed his cottage.

By this time Mrs. Velly had appeared, wrapped in an old grey dressing-gown. She was calm enough to give her husband a little flick with her foot as she passed him on her way to the pump, where Ambrose was furiously at work.

"Here, I can do that," she said, pushing him away from the pump-handle and beginning to work it with her gaunt, sinewy arms. Even in that moment of stress, Ambrose had time to feel a pang of disgust at the sight of his mother toiling like a man. Caleb arrived at last, and the three began to work furiously to save the interior fittings of the stable, the stalls and loose-box. It was vain, however; for the place was littered with loose straw that bore the flames to every part, and by the time the fire was extinguished the whole building was gutted, with nothing but the blackened walls and roof to form a chasm of ugly ruin. Then Caleb and Ambrose carried James Velly upstairs, and when they came down they found that Mrs. Velly was setting to work to boil the kettle for tea.

"Thank 'ee, missus, thank 'ee," said Caleb; "'tis cruel hard, but the hosses'll be back by morn. They'll not stray far."

"It's all of a piece, Vinnicombe," said Mrs. Velly quietly. "It's a losing game, but that I've always known."

There was a smear of smut across her face, and down it a white channel that had been traced by smarting tears.

"Mother," asked Ambrose, when Caleb had gone, "where in the world is Thyrza all this time?"

"I turned the key in her door when I came down. There's no call to let all the world see our shame."

"How's it all ever going to end?" said Ambrose, as they crouched over the fire, in the cold shivers that come when strained nerves relax. But Mrs. Velly's courage never failed her long.

"All well, if so be you're strong, Ambrose."

"How can I be, with day by day that spectacle in front of my eyes? And his blood in my veins, too."

"There's mine, too," said Mrs. Velly quietly. "Afore you come, it seemed to me as if some soul on t'other side was asking me to give 'en life. And then, when your little hand pressed my breast, it somehow seemed my man himself that took his life from me. And now, though he's dead to everything but his degradation, yet he's alive in you."

"Mother, don't you see that it's just that fact that I hate, fear—I don't know which. I sit here night after night waiting for his footsteps, with no power of work in me."

He pointed to the torn canvas, rent and slit with a knife that was lying on the settle.

"That's how it always ends," he said. "To-night, after my day away, I was in better spirits,—and then comes this."

He made a gesture of despair.

"Lad, you must win up where your father couldn't. He'd got brains, so have you. He hadn't got my spirit, but you have. Only believe in it, and you'll find the strength."

"I know what you mean. I always said to myself that father should be the last weak man in the line."

"Ay, you said it, you said it!" cried Mrs. Velly in a sort of triumph; "and you got it from me, for 'twas in my heart all the time before you come. Work, struggle, wait. Your chance must come at last."

Pacing up and down the room, he wondered whether Mrs. Velly had thought of the new trouble that faced them.

"The stables will have to be refitted," he said abruptly. "Where's the money to come from?"

"You must borrow it of Mr. Westaway," she answered instantly. She had, indeed, settled this matter in her mind long before the fire was even extinguished.

"I can't ask that. How could it ever be paid back?"

"I'm going to send Thyrza away, and the money saved through that will pay Mr. Westaway—interest and principal too."

"How can you possibly do without Thyrza?"

"When ruin's staring her in the face a woman doesn't go about finicking with her little finger cocked up," snapped Mrs. Velly. "Besides, she ought to go anyway. She's getting too fond of you."

Should he tell his mother of the relationship between himself and Thyrza, he wondered. But, by some process of telepathy, Mrs. Velly took the answer out of his mouth.

"She's soft," she said brutally. "She'd hang about 'ee and worship the very ground you trod on. But she wouldn't make a man of you. She'd only choke her husband with chillern and kisses. That's her sort."

"And isn't that a true kind of wife?"

"Oh, she'd be true enough. She'd never forget. She'd want the man to be the same lovesick husband he was in the first month."

"And I shouldn't be, you think?"

"A man can't be, that's got his work to do. You want a woman that can open the windows of life for 'ee. That can look into the distance, while you'm groping over the next step. The man to walk, the woman to look far ahead for 'en. That's the way it should be. Not to care for naught but his kisses and his chillern on her breast."

"He wants both sorts, maybe."

"He may so," said Mrs. Velly grimly; "but till we're all Turks he won't get 'em. Not easy, that is, nor open."

So Ambrose, naturally reluctant to bring fresh trouble on his mother, left Thyrza in the dark corner of his life, for the time, at any rate.

"I believe," said Ambrose, "that we ought to give up the farm. I could earn, if I were to get away."

Mrs. Velly held out her work-worn hand

"I'm going on," she said sternly, "as long as I've got hands to work with. For to give in now, with the rent unpaid, is bankruptcy. That I'll never do, never. It's my very life to keep up the struggle."

To Mrs. Velly there was, in truth, but one reliable way of making money, and that was out of the earth.

The next morning Mr. Velly sent for Ambrose to come to his room.

"Read that," he said, flinging on the counterpane a letter that his trembling hand had at last managed to abstract from a worn pocket-book that was more familiar with corn samples than papers. As Ambrose read it his face darkened, for it was a notice to quit the farm on account of seven years' arrears in rent, coupled with the offer of a small cottage at a nominal rental "on account of the past connection of the Velly family with the estate."

"I've made a mull of it," said Mr. Velly, as though appealing for his son's pity. He had been born at Long Furlong, like his father before him, and he knew every inch of it, "like the back of his hand," as he was wont to boast. Even now he could still remember a time when every morning had brought a fresh spring of power to grapple with work, and every evening the comfort of work done.

"Your mother mustn't know," said Mr. Velly. "I'll not have that. She doesn't know how bad it is."

"But," protested Ambrose, "she must know sooner or later. What's the good of putting off the evil day?"

"It'll be pretty nigh her death-blow," said Mr. Velly. "But it'll be good for you when the time comes. You ought to ha' gone long ago. But nobody asked me. I'm of no account in my own house."

To Mr. Velly the boy's return from his course of training had been a far greater blow than to Mrs. Velly, for in mental faculty Ambrose and his father were far more on the same level. In his boy, Mr. Velly saw himself over again, and understood the pitfalls that life had ready, in a way that was impossible to Mrs. Velly's stronger will.

"Pin-pricks," he maundered on, while Ambrose watched him, "pin-pricks, it was they that brought me here. All the slights, the raised eyebrows, the looks from everybody, from your mother most of all; for they all meant that folks looked for nothing but what was bad in me. First-long, I got drunk a time or two, and after that they always looked for it again. I could see it. When I rapped out something wild, they'd say, 'Ay, there's his father coming out, or his grandfather mayhap. It's been a regular game of uppy-down-daps with me, putting up a cockshy and flinging stones at it."

With a sickening sense that these were his own fears repeated in a stronger form, Ambrose turned away and went downstairs.

In the keen atmosphere of a town, and above all, free from the malaria of imaginative heredity, Mr. Velly might have found strength to stand upright, for his very sensitiveness to impressions would have been a help, since to such mimetic brains the country air is often sodden in its tranquillity. Here at Long Furlong, like a dog with a famous sire, he had always been expected to betray the qualities of his forebears, and he had thoroughly lived up to people's expectations.

The next evening, with many cold tremors at his audacity, Ambrose set out to call on Mr. Westaway. It was the first time he had ever looked forward to a call at the Vicarage with anything but feelings of pleasant anticipation.

One of the minor pleasures of Mr. Westaway's life was the method and neatness displayed in his note-books, one set of which was devoted to genealogical accounts of the

Devon families, and the other to West-country folk-lore and dialect. It was a joy to him to inscribe the last page of a beautifully kept register, and an even keener joy to begin writing up a fresh one. He took pleasure in the smoothness of the paper and the sweep of his fine letters; for if this world is full of the possibilities of vexation, it has also many out-of-the-way occasions of delight.

He needed a little relief to-night, for he had just been the victim of the Rev. Samuel Vellacott's pastoral attentions.

"But, my dear Westaway!" he exclaimed, "the step you propose will give a terrible handle to the enemy. It cannot but be a mere phase, a temporary aberration in a man so well-intentioned as yourself."

Mr. Vellacott was obsessed by the word "phase"; he repeated it in various connections, till his own genial purpose to make the best of both worlds proved so irritating to a man who felt himself a failure in each, that Mr. Westaway began to wish he had never been born.

"I understand that it isn't the oppositions of science, falsely so-called, that are driving you to this course—I went into that a good deal once—but merely the want of a definite theological programme on the part of our Church. Now couldn't something be done by a more judicious course of reading?"

Mr. Westaway laughed outright, for Mr. Vellacott so evidently regarded him as an infant, for whom something temporary could be rigged up, with a teapot in lieu of a feeding bottle. The good man had departed with the intention of ransacking his library for Mr. Westaway's benefit.

It was relief to Damaris, in the midst of her preoccupation with what was called in clerical circles "the Westaway scandal," to bring Ambrose into the study, for he would surely not be occupied with either theology or social science.

She settled herself by the fire to hear his errand, rather to poor Ambrose's disgust. For the painful task of borrowing had never fallen to his lot before.

"I turned back twice," he said, "on my way here, because I can't bear to ask you to help me."

"You can say anything to me, I hope, my boy," said Mr. Westaway. "Perhaps it would help you if I were to talk about myself first. You remember our talk in Exeter? Well, I'm going to act up to my convictions. I'm leaving Hartland and going to try to spend some of my money on the workers from whom it came. Now tell me what you come for to-night."

Briefly Ambrose stammered out the story of the burning of the stable. Before he had finished, Damaris crossed the room, and, touching her father on the shoulder, said impulsively—

"Father, we must help. Say you'll pay for the refitting."

"We'll pay interest regularly," said Ambrose with a scarlet face.

As she saw it, Damaris felt that she had embarrassed him further by her presence.

"My boy, you shall have it gladly. Damaris is right. Get the estimate and reckon on me," said Mr. Westaway warmly. "I wish I could help you professionally, too. I got some curious information from my lawyer the other day about what must have been at one time the estate belonging to your forefathers."

"Tonacombe, you mean, sir," said Ambrose. "I've heard mother say that father's people once owned it. But that was years ago."

"Ay, Tonacombe," said Mr. Westaway, "over in Morwenstow parish. It's a small estate now, for one of the Velly ancestors divided it up and sold portions of it, but the manor itself remains, and it's that rare thing, a barton—

that is, land where all the boundary hedges are the property of the estate, showing that it was originally held by the first settlers in the country, who gathered neighbours after their settlement."

With delicate tact Mr. Westaway was trying to give Ambrose a lift-up out of his present humiliation.

"You're of a fine stock, Ambrose," he said. "Forget your immediate ancestors and go back to the sources; for those Velly forebears of yours at Tonacombe were straight in all the essentials of honest life. In all their records there's written the story of clean living and high endeavour."

"Father, father," said Damaris to herself, "what a gentleman you are, for all your perverse thinking." Her steadfast eyes shone on Ambrose with the light that always seemed to him far above his stature, the light that is full of the strength of the hills.

"What have you been doing lately?" she asked, as with the characteristic swing of his head Ambrose recovered his sense of personal dignity, lost for a moment in his father's degradation.

"I've been a regular round of visits to the churches hereabouts, drawing the wood-carving," he answered. "I know why the old designers did better work; they never carved from drawn designs as the moderns do."

Ambrose's chief attraction was that he always took the nearest person into his confidence, feeling sure that he would sympathise. He usually did, for nothing in the world is so engaging as a truly childlike disposition.

Damaris sat leaning forward with her chin on her hands, trying to realise his life, his double life as student and farmer. For he was a relief from gentle scholarliness, and she was prepared to idealise everything in so vivid a creature. Although she had always thought of him before as a youth of talent, she had often laughed at Mr. Westaway's fondness for him. To-night she saw him with her father's eyes, for to her the Westaway house was a house of age, where even the low, easy steps seemed made for the faltering tread of an old man. But here was a thing of sinews and nerves and lusty keenness. She had once met him riding a bare-backed horse, and it now seemed a revelation in supple strength. For an imaginative girl will endow the pulpiest curate with the thews of a Sandow and the nerve-force of a Gladstone; the readiness is all. In Damaris Westaway's longing for the real, too, Ambrose's life, with the scent of newly turned earth about it and the manifold humming of bees, was idyllic, and yet in a delicious sense, coarse, with the coarseness of splendid labour that strains in the traces and sweats in the sunlight.

"I've been fanciful," he was saying, "in talking about people copying nature in stone. They did in carvings, but not in building."

"How do you mean?" said Mr. Westaway, thinking that trouble seemed to be turning the lad into a thinker. True, they had been thought before, no doubt, these discoveries of his, but they had not come to him from books, since he saw scarcely any on architecture.

"Everything in building comes from practical need," said Ambrose; "one man after another adds an idea to the ideas of earlier ones. Look"—he took a scrap of paper and a pencil and began to sketch—"the intersection of the circular arch gave the pointed arch. And traceried windows came from one man putting in a cusp and another a window slit, and so on."

"No one ever evolved a whole new form?" asked Damaris.

"They grew," said Ambrose, "every one."

"I like it better that way," said she. "For bit by bit a great art is the joint work of man, not of *a* man. It's one of the finest thoughts I've ever heard, for by it we are all bound together, all seeking to express ourselves, and one helping the other to do so."

"Father, too," she thought, "is trying instinctively to join himself to the work of his age." Flashing along the words came to Damaris a vague sense of a deeper meaning still.

More life and fuller; it sums up all the desires that can be. For from it springs that desire for the life of the whole that leads men to purity and unselfishness, since evil leads to the death of the whole. From it, too, springs the craving for personal life that hurls men down the slope of death; in desire for life dwells alike the strength of the hills and the flame of hell.

In the beginning, say the mystics, the ineffable felt the desire for manifestation—and to manifest oneself is to live; out of desire for life, then, came the universe.

"It's wonderful, this progression," said Damaris, looking into the fire.

"But it didn't go on," said Ambrose doggedly, "for the Puritans killed all growth in architecture. And now all we can do is to imitate."

"One mistake of one generation, and darkness follows," commented Damaris.

She was inevitably turning all his thoughts to moral issues.

"But that makes it easier to do the things that seem hard," she said; "for if our bit of work isn't well done, we are breaking a greater chain than we can ever measure. That must be what the Atonement means. For we are all one, the man that lives to-day and the man that lived a thousand years ago. All one, because we work at one great task, the manifestation of the divine."

As Ambrose thrilled in response to the aspiration of her voice, Thyrza's devotion seemed to belong to another planet, for to him Damaris was an incarnation of the spiritual, another wandering gleam, like the boy's voice in the cathedral. Of her as woman, he hardly thought at all, she seemed so far above him.

Yet, after all, it was Mr. Westaway, and not Damaris, who had given him a fresh brood of desires. His thoughts were with those honest men of Tonacombe who walked their acres in the light of day and of other people's approbation. The very fact of the degradation of the present representative of the family knit the thought into the fibre of his heart-strings. Once back there at Tonacombe and men would forget there had ever been a Velly of Long Furlong who was constantly "market-merry."

The next moment he laughed aloud at the preposterous folly of a penniless lad, who had just borrowed fifty pounds to pay for the fitting of a stable, daring to lift his eyes to the manor of Tonacombe.

Yet, preposterous as it was, he began to reckon up his assets. On one gift he could rely: from the mere plan of a building set before him, he could paint a picture in light and shade, paint it as accurately as though he had set up his easel in front of its walls. He had even been able to visualise pictures of unbuilt machines and boats, for other men's abstractions were to him solid realities. This gift might gain him work in a large office, but it would be a mere journeyman's wage that he would earn. At the knowledge Tonacombe faded into a cloud vision, the merest castle in Spain.

All the while Damaris sat in front of the study fire, weaving visions, too, and the centre of them was a man, as is, indeed, apt to be the case when the builder of the cloud-castle is a woman.

CHAPTER IX

THE WOOD OF THE GOLDEN SHADOWS

THERE was a tense silence in the kitchen at Long Furlong while one could count a hundred. Outside the windows the gulls circled and screamed as, with eyes that followed their wheeling flights unconsciously, Thyrza stood in front of Mrs. Velly, feeling like a swimmer pushed from a supporting plank. She continued to pass her hands over the creases of the half-ironed tablecloth on which she had been at work.

"I can't afford to keep you," said Mrs. Velly, with unusual nervousness. "If you've got any eyes in your head, you'll see I can't."

"Does Ambrose know I'm to go?" said Thyrza at last.

"Yes," said Mrs. Velly curtly.

Then all these days, thought Thyrza, Ambrose must have known of the sentence of exile that had been passed on her; all these days he had been silent, letting the blow fall without any attempt to soften it. To-day he was away, for Mr. Westaway had given him a commission to prepare a dozen drawings of church screens for an article.

Beneath the woman who loves there is always the woman who watches, noting, with the keen perception that she would fain avoid, the amount of tenderness and protection that her lover lavishes on her. For at first she expects "her man" to be the shadow of a rock at noonday to her; she confidently looks for the ways of life to become padded with ease for her footsteps.

Thyrza flashed into hate in a second. She would not be cast off so easily, for Ambrose should be made to pay for his callousness. But as she turned to Mrs. Velly she knew from the older woman's face that her secret was guessed. The knowledge sealed her lips, for to tell now would seem like pleading to be allowed to stay on sufferance.

Then Thyrza turned on her heel, and without a word walked out of the room. She had got down to the bare essentials of the fact that both Ambrose and Mrs. Velly wanted her gone. That was all she meant now to either of them—a thing to be quit of as soon as it became inconvenient. Yet up till now, to Thyrza, encircled by the halo of Ambrose's tenderness, the world had been a glory instead of a menace.

Strong drink is a mocker; so is love, so is success. All lie, but it is the lie that we love; for by it we escape the root fact of the universe, the antagonism of life and nature. They are all man's enemies; the fire that warms him, the wind that fills his sails, the sea that bears his merchandise, fierce beasts that wait for a moment's carelessness on his part to fasten their fangs in him. And the antagonism of nature runs all through into the spirit of man, for every new face is the possible face of another enemy. Between the universe and himself man craves, then, for a halo, an ether through which the enmity may be unseen. We are strangers in a hostile country, but we would fain forget it in the glamour of love, the fumes of wine, or the exultation of a moment's conquest. And now the ether was gone from Thyrza.

A little while later she came down again, to find Mrs. Velly going on with the interrupted ironing. The girl was dressed in her outdoor clothes, and about her there was a quiet decision that cowed even Mrs. Velly.

"I'm going," she said to the old woman; "I've packed my box, and when I want it I'll send for it."

"You know I never meant you to go like this. Why, you've nowhere even to sleep!" exclaimed Mrs. Velly.

"It doesn't matter what becomes of me, I reckon," said Thyrza; "but I shan't come to harm. Chrissie Rosevear's often asked me to stop with her for a day or two. I can look round from there to see after a place."

"Half-way down the lane she heard steps running after her, and Mrs. Velly's voice calling—

"Here, child," said she, "here's a pasty for your dinner, and your money. Don't 'ee be harder on me than you can help. It cut me sore to see the way you took it."

They sobbed a minute, holding each other, while through the minds of both flashed the memory of the pleasant homely times that were over now; the needlework with the long seams they had stitched together, the winter afternoons spent baking the week's supply of cake or buns.

"You'll give 'en my dear, dear love," whispered Thyrza at last. She felt Mrs. Velly nod, but Thyrza knew perfectly that Ambrose's mother would try to keep secret where she had gone.

So they parted, in a mood of half-dissembled enmity.

Outside Hartland, Thyrza sat for a minute in the hedge to wipe away the tears of self-pity that had rendered most things on the road partially invisible. She was soon after jogging along in the carrier's van that plies between Bradworthy and Hartland.

"My dear days, look at that!" exclaimed Tammy Hockridge from the corner of the cart, where she sat opposite to Thyrza. She was a lively, kissworthy soul, and licensed to sell beer, snuff, and tobacco in Hartland town.

"'Tis like sweethearting," said Mrs. Vanstone, who sat by Tammy's side; "you'm all nicey, he says as plain as if he spoke."

The eyes of all the passengers turned from the oil swirling in the overhead lamp towards Thyrza, around whom a bee was circling with a low humming note of pleasure, neglecting the honey with which the van was packed for her lips and hair. For a second or two he crept against her neck, poising himself under her chin.

"Iss, he's a sweetheart and no mistake," said Tammy, with a laugh as vivid as her hard, red cheeks. "Terrible scarce, chaps be, too," she added cheerfully.

"So us must put up with drumble drones, I s'pose," sniffed a sour voice from the darkest corner; Mrs. Goodenough was one of those fretful women who complain for forty years because the sun refuses to shine on both sides of the house at once.

"And scarcer up the country than they be here," continued Tammy.

"Well," said a withered, toothless remnant, "'tis all for the best if they be scarce. Sister and me allays says what a blessing 'twas when our only brother was put away safe in his black box. For he'd have been sure to have made away with our little bit of money, spekelating and that with it."

"How old was he when he died, Miss Beard?" asked Thyrza.

"He was but two years old, my dear."

"Good land! that's early for spekelating," said Thyrza.

"Ay, they'm wearing, chaps be," said Mrs. Vanstone.

"'Tis dullish without 'em, though," chimed in Tammy. "I've had two, and if Sam was to go, why, I should be on the look-out for a third."

"One man gives 'ee a taste for 'em, I reckon," said the "bitter weed" in the corner.

"My sister had the worst old bufflehead to deal with that ever I come across," said Tammy, "for contrarier couldn't be hatched than old Jim Lewarne, that was her husband's father. He was allays over books, was my sister's father-law, till what he read turned sour in 'en."

"Ay," said Thyrza, "there's no good in too much o' that."

"Well, my dears," said Tammy, looking round at the circle of womenfolk in motherly fashion, "at last he would have it that there's too many folks by half in this 'ere world, and that 'twas a sin that any more little innocents should be brought into such a miz-maze as this be."

"Flying in the face of nature," said Mrs. Vanstone firmly.

"And so I said," said Tammy; "but us cured 'en of that, did us Hartland women. For when John—that's my sister's man—died, her went to keep house for the old man, his father, being his daughter-law. And that very night the old rapscallion talked shameful to her. 'I'll have no squally brats about my house,' said he."

"Ay, I can mind," chuckled Mrs. Goodenough, cheerful for once; "he'd a voice like a girt bull."

"So he had, my dear. But for that saying, he had a judgment. He went away to Plymouth for six weeks, and when he came back he was a granfer, though he didn't know it, for, as luck 'ud have it, the cheeld come when he was away. And that poor woman, my sister Liza-Ann, didn't dare have the dear cheeld in the same house with that old I-talian."

Italian is a term of reproach in the West.

"Tchuh, tchuh, tchuh," cackled the company.

"Still the poor soul couldn't bear it out of her sight, so her'd carr' it up to her room of a night, secret like. But he heard summat, for he'd say of a morning, 'Never did I hear anything like they cats a-squalling last night.'"

"And that his own grandcheeld," said Thyrza, with uplifted hands.

"And him that could sleep through most nigh anything! Contrairy he was, beyond all telling. 'But,' says I to her, 'this can't go on, 'tis wearing of 'ee to skin and bone.' So us settled something. One afternoon Liza-Ann pretended to go away for the day. And in the afternoon, when old Jim come into the house, there, all comfortable before the fire, was a cradle, and in it a baby."

"The dear lamb," said every one in consort.

"Liza-Ann was watching from the stairs in the dimmet, so that he couldn't see her."

"Her heart must ha' been going pit-a-pat," said Thyrza, her eyes soft with childish delight in a story.

"He didn't say nort for a bit, then he went up, kind of coorious, and turned back the blanket a bit. And there he stood, with the cheeld's lips a-twitching at him."

"Ay; wanted rabbits' brains, it did," said Mrs. Vanstone. It is the country remedy for a child's facial twitches.

"Presently, the dear doubled up his fistesses, and away to go with a bawl. It come out just as us had planned. And out rushed that old gubbins into the green, fair mad with the noise, and roars, same as if he was hailing of a ship—

"'Hi! Mrs. Nancarrow, Mrs. Hockridge, Mrs. Slee, you'm wanted!'

"But us was all shaking behind our window curtains, watching, and not a woman of us stirred. At last he turned, fair beat, and he took that cheeld up and happing upon the bottle—

"Well, when Liza-Ann come out of the corner, there was the baby a-winking in the old man's face, and him with his empty pipe in his mouth for comfort, for he didn't dare get his left arm from under the cheeld to light up.

"'And,' says Liza-Ann to 'en, 'that's your son's that is.'

"''Tisn't a bad little maid,' says he, 'but uncommon boney.'

"'Maid,' says she, laughing; ''tis a fine boy-cheeld.'

"But here us be at last, thanks be," said Tammy. "I'm that cramped that I couldn't tell which be my legs and which be the baskets, if 'twasn't for the pain that's in 'em."

The low-roofed, whitewashed houses of Bradworthy have never heard the whistle of a train and the cry of a flock of seagulls passing storm-driven inland is the wildest sound usually heard in this place of old-world peace. The four-armed directing post in the grassy quadrangle round which the houses cluster suggests the leisure of pack-horse travelling, and is as full of the romance of the past as the magic phrase "the great north road." To stand on the green in the shadow of the coming night, when the light from the inn doors lies ruddy across the grass and the forge fire sends up a shower of sparks, is to feel the thrill of the days when the highways were full of the zest of "stand and deliver."

Pattens are, even now, not unknown in Bradworthy in the fall, when woodlands are miry and the grass a pulp of sodden roots, when lanthorns flicker across from house to house in the long, dark autumn evenings, when the hours strike solemnly from the belfry tower, and the only other sound is the cackle of a goose, or, mayhap, the voices of housewives calling from doorstep to doorstep.

Chrissie Rosevear's cottage looked on the green, and Chrissie herself was kneading dough at the table of the living-room.

"Well, I never did, Thyrza Braund!" she exclaimed, "and have you come to market with all the rest of the folks? Come in the van, have 'ee? Come right in and sit ye down, my dear."

It was market-day in Bradworthy, and down one side of the square stood a few cows, dropping milk from full udders, with tottering calves at their flanks. Over the stalls of the market-women circled a mass of bees, supplementing the bass and treble of the human chorus with their hum.

"I've left Long Furlong for good," said Thyrza. "Mrs. Velly says she cannot afford to hire any more."

"Well, I don't know that I'm surprised, nuther. And there's another thing. 'Tis never safe to have a woman younger'n seventy-five in the house with a man about, and I reckon that's what Mrs. Velly found."

Thyrza smiled a rather wan smile, although the suggestion was not, on the whole, displeasing.

"Can I bide here with 'ee a bit, Chrissie? I dunno where else to go, and I can pay all right till I've got a new place."

"There, cheeld," said Chrissie, getting up and giving her a great smacking kiss. "Your bite and sup'll cost little enough. You shall bide as long as ever you want to. As long as you can put up with John," she laughed; "for he's aggravating in some ways, though a long sight better'n he used to be to live with. It gives me the toothache something cruel when he begins to whistle; but if a woman makes her wedded man a worrit, her's worse than a hen that complains of fleas in a poultry roost. So I never say nothen to 'en about the whistling."

From outside the cottage, where John Rosevear was occupying the dinner-hour in nailing up a creeper, there came the words whistled through his teeth over and over again without cessation—

Up and down the City Road,
  In and out the Eagle,
That's the way the money goes,
  Pop goes the weasel.

Then Chrissie caught a glimpse of Thyrza's face.

"Just you come upstairs," she said, "now you've had a cup of tea, and have a wash, and then go out and see what's going on. I'd go with 'ee, but I must get this baking done. And if I was you, I wouldn't set my mind upon what might have been, but upon what is—and make up my mind to like it."

Thus Chrissie voiced the great working principle of practical philosophy.

As Thyrza looked down on the tops of the people's heads from the bedroom above, she began to feel that after the stillness of the farm this was the great world. Good cheer came back to her, as she brushed out her hair and watched it ripple under the strokes in a bright mass. Then she leant for a moment over the window-sill. A cheap-jack, or Johnny Fortnight, as travelling pedlars are called by the "old ancient" folks in the west, was shouting from a chair on which he stood. Against the directing post close by four pigs scratched their black hides. Above the men's shouts and the women's cackle Thyrza could just catch the cheap-jack's words. He had passed from the selling of toothache cure to deal with the matter of wedding rings, or brass circles that passed for such at a distance.

"Here, ladies and gentlemen," said he, holding up a disc that flashed in the sunshine, "is the time to provide against the future. Here's a brand new wedding ring, warranted to bring health, happiness and long life to the happy pair, and all for half a crown."

"And how many kids?" shouted a voice.

"Just a baker's dozen," answered the chapman with a grin.

"Then 'tis not for my money," said a yokel, while his maiden nudged his ribs to reduce him to silence.

"It can't be that there's no more marrying and giving in marriage in this here charming village retreat! What offers, gentlemen?"

"They'm all married a'ready, and wish they wasn't," shouted some one.

"Tenpence," said a sheepish lad on the extreme outskirts of the crowd.

"Wedded bliss for tenpence!" cried the cheap-jack; "and who says the Liberals have sent the prices up, with a wedding ring going for tenpence?"

"One shilling," said a voice well known to Thyrza. She stood on tip-toe with a wildly beating heart, and as she did so she caught a flash from the bidder's eyes. It was Ambrose; across the crowd their glances met, till he could see her bosom heave.

"Ay, here's the gent for my money," said the Johnny Fortnight, handing Ambrose the ring.

A few minutes later, at a sign from him, Thyrza hurried downstairs and out of the house. At the sound of her going, John and Chrissie stared, open-mouthed.

"My dear sawl, just look at that, John," said Chrissie from the doorstep, as she saw Thyrza and Ambrose pass the house with glances locked and hands not far off the same linking. "The little rip!" she exclaimed. "Why, she come over here on purpose to meet 'en! John, my mind misgives me."

"Don't 'ee turn a vinegar-bottle in your old age, my dear," said John, removing the nails from his mouth for the purpose of enjoying a more commodious grin; "'tis naught but a bit of sweethearting, and that's as sure to come as death and taxes."

Mrs. Rosevear's sniff would have been audible on the other side of the green on normal Bradworthy days as she watched the two walking away from the crowd.

"Why, Thyrza, what on earth's the meaning of this?"

asked Ambrose. "I rode over to have a look at the church, and very peculiar it is to see so large a one supported without pillars. But what in the name of wonder are you doing here?"

He had taken her left hand and was slipping the ring he had bought of the cheap-jack on her wedding finger. She resisted a little, exclaiming pettishly, "'Twill bring bad luck, Ambrose, for 'tis but brass." But he persisted in his effort.

"A Brummagem marriage," he laughed. "There, just glance down at it. Doesn't it look fine?"

"Why, what is it?" he exclaimed, suddenly noticing her pale, distressed face. "Don't let my foolishness worry you. Here, let's take it off at once."

But she would not let him remove it.

"Your mother's turned me away," she said. "I know what 'twas for, too. And you didn't care if I had to go, not after all there's been between us."

At the sight of his face her bitter anger had died away, but nothing could destroy her feeling of his unkindness.

"Thyrza, don't you know there's just one thing I can't bear? I hate to see people miserable. I couldn't tell you that mother wanted you to go; 'twasn't in me to see your lips quiver and your eyes fill with tears. I did try to, but I couldn't do it. I went away to-day, partly because I knew she was going to speak to you. But here we are together after all. Isn't it just too good to be true? The whole world's in a conspiracy to bring you and me together, love."

They wandered away from the houses into the country stillness that laps the village close. Turning across a field path that led from the road upwards to a wood, they pushed open a rickety gate and found themselves in a circular plantation of trees, mostly ashes, the witch-ashes, that bleed when cut, according to country superstition. Here in the centre of the trees there was a cleared space where the sunlight, caught in a net by the branches, blazed hotly on the pale primrose and tawny brown hues of bracken.

Thyrza sat on a felled tree-trunk and Ambrose lay down beside her. The sound of the faintly sighing wind outside sent shudders of joy through the girl's blood. Here, in summer, the place was full of the acrid smell of the cow-parsley, that speaks of love's cruelty, of the nepenthe of the blue-bells, the nepenthe of love's yielding, full, too, of waves of hawthorn scent, threaded with the keen savour of woodruff.

Now only the golden shadows fell between the tree-trunks, and as Ambrose looked down the glades all round them, he seemed to have gone back to a time when men and women were part of the glory, not the shadow, of a world darkened by no human sense of pain.

"The wood of the golden shadows, my Thyrza," he said, laying his head on her lap, while she stretched out her hand to curl a lock of his hair round her finger.

But it was impossible for Thyrza to forget the sorrow of parting in the joy of the moment; for to do that is the man's gift, and is only learnt by women after a long apprenticeship to trouble.

"Ambrose," she said, schooling herself to quiet speech with a loving woman's instinctive terror of annoying a man, "don't 'ee care that now we'll never meet? And I thought we'd soon be married, and that you'd go on living at the farm."

"But we'll manage to meet sometimes, Thyrza."

"But 'tisn't the same as it used to be, as 'twas till only this morning."

He moved restlessly, in hatred of tears.

"Do 'ee care for me really, Ambrose?" she asked at length.

"I love you, Thyrza. But you must remember that I've my way to make."

But she could not understand how he could put anything before their love; it is the great limitation of such as Thyrza.

"Ambrose," she asked, "do 'ee think if I never have 'ee for my own here, I will somewhere else? I mean after we're dead. For I feel now that you'm going away from me. Leaving Long Furlong's altered everything."

"I don't know, Thyrza, for some don't think there is another life for us at all."

"And I might miss 'ee, too," said Thyrza, the vastness of fate overwhelming her fancy.

'But I shall often see you. Never mind about the shades. We're solid lovers, child, you and I," protested Ambrose.

"Do 'ee remember the cricket, Ambrose? We'll never hear 'en together again."

"Never mind. We'll get another one somewhere, when we set up house together."

They sat in silence, till Ambrose's lids sank and deeper breathing came from him. He had been up all the night before, as Thyrza knew, with a sick animal. When his breathing told that he was sound asleep, she took off her cloak and threw it over him.

The watching face above him became older, as the shadows fell instead of the sunlight. Lines that would be on it years later were faintly foreshadowed, as the purple afterglow began to fill the sky.

To the thought of a woman who loves there is no present. Backward in the lives of the women whose instincts thrill through her nerves, she lives; forward into the future, her fancies spring. In the first kiss a woman feels all her life-story; she knows what it will be to feel the downy head of a child on her breast, almost she can hear the sound of its cry. As Thyrza waited she grew desperate, for she knew now that this man belonged to a world where she could not follow him. With the faint hold over him that absence would give her, she would soon fade to a grey ghost, haunting in time the shadowy places of casual recollection. She knew that it was getting late, that Chrissie would wonder what had become of her. But these moments were as gold to the miser, as honey of wheat to the famine-stricken.

At last Ambrose moved, opened his eyes and sat up.

"Why, Thyrza," he said, "what have you been doing to let me sleep like this?"

He bent down to look at his watch.

"Come," he said, "you look pinched with cold."

They walked back to Bradworthy in silence, Thyrza in the comatose condition that follows on emotion, and Ambrose in a mood of annoyance. The clouds were massed overhead by now, and the night was evidently bringing rain.

As they entered the village Thyrza told him where she was staying.

"But you must have some tea before you go back to Chrissie's," he said, leading the way across the trampled grass to the inn. He ordered their meal in the upstair room that looks out across the square.

"You're frozen, little wife," he said, drawing her to the fire that the waitress had just lit, and pulling off her wet shoes. "There, listen to what I shall have to ride through," he continued, as the lash of the rain began to sweep across the house roofs.

There was a haste on him to be gone, but he would not let her see it, lest she should misconstrue it, in her own enjoyment of the sweet sorrow of parting. In his restlessness he began to walk up and down the room. Yet he tried to tell himself what a good day they had enjoyed together.

"When do 'ee start?" she asked later on, when the tea things had been removed and she could sit curled up on the rug.

"In a minute or two," he said, feeling a dread of himself that amounted to panic.

"That's good-bye," she whispered. "Ambrose, there'll be other women, I reckon. But I'll have had 'ee for to-day."

"Thyrza, Thyrza," he cried, drawing her up to him, "there's no other woman but you."

But she persisted.

"It has been good to be with 'ee, Ambrose, even if it's all I ever have."

The silence was full of voices. The wash of rain came steadily down, and through the open window they could see a lanthorn light flickering across the square. The lowing of a cow robbed of her calf was the only other sign of life.

"'Tis like home, this," she said, "home for you and me. Like happy women live always, side by side with their man."

"Ay, 'tis home for to-night," said Ambrose.

Something strange in his voice made her glance at his face. "Little missus," he whispered, lifting her hand where the brass ring still shone.

In a flash of memory his words, "a Brummagem marriage," sounded like a sneer; no gold, only brass for her. And she had been driven from his mother's house this morning. Pride turned the scale, changing her weakness to strength.

"Now you must go," she said quietly. "I don't know whatever Chrissie will say to me as it is."

"Forgive me," he whispered, "for all. But you're the dearest thing there is in the world to me, a part of my life for ever."

She managed to show quite a smiling face to him, as she stood in the porch of the inn watching him ride away. But it took her a long time to get across to Chrissie's cottage. Before she had reached it, indeed, Ambrose had joined a man he knew and was deep in horse-talk, deliberately turning his thoughts from the sadness of parting.

Over the threshold of the cottage Chrissie was waiting for her guest, whilst John, brushing up in the room above, shook with silent laughter at the storm of her eloquence. He was delighted to hear the thunder rattling about some one else's ears, and through the unplastered "planchin'" he could hear every word.

"Now," said Chrissie, "just you sit down there and hear what I've got to say to 'ee. I've kept company with several in my time."

"Ho!" said her husband to himself.

"But, let me tell you, I always knew how to respect myself. You'll come to a bad end, Thyrza Braund, and Mrs. Velly had her reasons."

"She didn't want Ambrose to get to care for me, that was all. Oh, Chrissie, don't scold me any more. I shan't see 'en for nobody knows when."

"I wasn't born for the Garden of Eden afore there was any need for fig-leaves," snapped Chrissie. "And you can't fill up my mouth with a lot of old wool, telling me you didn't know you'd meet 'en here."

"I didn't know it," said Thyrza doggedly; "but if you go on same as this is, I shall go."

"Where?"

"I dunno. But I won't stay here."

"Yes, you will. You don't cross this dreshel to-night.

You'll sit down there and eat your supper like a decent Christian."

Chrissie was scintillating with joy at the prospect of a fresh campaign. Her hunger for material on which to work was really the reason for her quickly recurrent matrimonial ventures, for each new husband had a new set of habits that required pruning. Thyrza was almost as great a godsend as a new man would have been, for John, now rolling about in paroxysms of delight overhead, was really getting a trifle too closely clipped to supply much practice for Chrissie's special talents.

"What's that on your finger?" she screamed, as she caught sight of the ring. "Now, I know how you got that. Well, afore I'd allow a man to make game of me like that, I'd see 'en to Flanders. You've let yourself be treated light, that's plain, or there wouldn't be that old mockery upon your finger. Eighteen carat gold wouldn't be too good for me, I can tell 'ee, and it oughtn't to be for you. Take it off and shy it on the fire, and the next young man that comes along, tell 'en to respect 'ee."

Thyrza took it off with a trembling hand, and Chrissie tossed it contemptuously into the stove fire.

"I like men myself," she said expansively, "and I like to have plenty of 'em about. That's the worst of marriage," she added frankly; "it gives 'ee but one to manage, and I could easy keep a dozen of 'em going. But they'm like great jolly chillern, and you must sweeten their porridge for 'em yourself, else they'll empt the whole basin into it. Just you keep all the sweets from 'em under lock and key, and when I say sweets, I don't mean sugar. For you've got to make up your mind to lead, just as far as you have a mind for 'em to go, and no further. I've heard women say they wish they'd been born men. I don't. Anybody can be a man for me. For the men may do the work, as far's

I'm concerned, if they'll only leave me one job—the management of them that does it."

Thyrza sat dazed under this flood of eloquence, yet, remembering the look in Ambrose Velly's eyes that night, she had a dim comprehension of the trend of Chrissie's cryptic utterances.

"My dear," said Chrissie kindly, "after a pause, never mind how many men you have to do with, so long as you keep to one rule."

She held up her forefinger impressively.

"Let 'em leave the better for having knowed 'ee and not a mite the worse. For though they'm big and masterful outside, 'tis from us women they learn to think high—or think low—in their heart of hearts. And from nobody else. I allays say, tell me what women he likes, and I'll tell 'ee what the man is."

"But now," she said, in a hospitable bustle, "I wouldn't run any more tears into that pancake if I was you, for 'twill make it lie heavy on your stomich, and I kept it a-purpose for you and popped it into the oven the minute I heard 'ee coming up the path. And don't you worrit about Ambrose Velly, for what's no good never comes to any harm. I don't think any wrong of 'ee, not me. 'Twill work out to 'Will 'ee have this woman,' all right and proper, with you and him. Just you see if it doesn't."

"No, it won't," sobbed Thyrza, regardless of pancake.

"Well, and if it don't, 'twill be somebody better then. I've often thought I was rather too quick in settling on John, when I've seed some fine upstanding chap or other."

"Good Lord!" said John to himself, wisely descending the stairs, in order to avoid further revelations.

CHAPTER X

THE LEAPING FLAME

WHISTLING now high, now low, with trills and quavers most delightful in their happiness, Ambrose bent over his work in the barn at Long Furlong. One ray of sunlight from a window near the roof lit up the musky stillness of the place where long trestle tables stood piled with wood-carving tools and the materials for modelling in plaster.

It was Sunday, the only day when he could count on uninterrupted leisure for some hours; and before him lay a panel on which he was carving a design of wheatears, working straight on to the material, without a drawn design. The cranks and pistons of his brain were going full steam ahead, while he watched the picture in his mind as though it were an image reflected in the still waters of a lagoon. Then suddenly the tune of the "Raggle-taggle gypsies" ceased, for he had struck upon the idea which was to influence much of the aftercourse of his life; all the time that he had been trying experiments on plaster or on wood he had been learning the first lesson of the plastic artist, the limitations of material. By beginning with painting he had started at the wrong end. Instead, he must set himself to learn the qualities of stone, wood, glass, iron, even of drapery. In short, it concerned him to be a craftsman first, for only so was it possible to rival the work of the master-craftsmen of old who speak a language we understand, but which we stammer haltingly, as men use a foreign tongue with which they are not at home.

"The working hands and the designing brain cannot ultimately be separated, as they are now," he said slowly to himself. Then, in a moment, he sketched the structure of a life-work; in a flash he saw the great workshop, echoing with saw and chisel, hammer and steam-crane, that he would build. It pleased him to fancy that in his veins ran the blood of a race of artificers, for out of goldsmiths' shops there have come artists by the score. Already he could hear the rhythmic tapping of hammers, beating in unison like a mighty heart of labour, the warmest, most brotherly sound in the world, and fuller far of hope than the chanted benedictions of church aisles. For through all diversity of purpose, it is the sense of the common aim of labour that heartens to his task the loneliest thinker, no less than the busiest engineer.

Then, as if a hand had passed a sponge across a slate, it was all blotted out in the thought of his poverty and dependence, of the practical struggle for mere existence that was before him.

To the making of the plastic artist there go so many endowments that it is no wonder so few have been given to the world. The perception of the nature of the material in which he works, the power to visualise what he would create, these are the first half, the mental gift. But without the power of the trained hand, shaped through dark, untraced channels of ancestry, the mental gift is of no avail. And, most difficult of all, there must be a single-hearted devotion that sees no other object worthy of effort save the one. For the world only yields the rarest secrets of her loveliness to the man of single mind, and knowledge of the world's loveliness is genius, greater or less in proportion to the secrets known.

And that means death—death to many motives that rule other men; for the artist has to learn to sport only with the tangles of the Muse's hair.

> Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
> Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
> For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
> To cover—the three first without a wife. . . .

So it runs, and with truth. Above all, art suffers no bowing in the temple of Mammon, and over her temple is written—"Abandon affairs, all ye who enter here."

But these things were, as yet, hidden from Ambrose, and already between him and his work there had stolen the thought of Thyrza Braund alone to-day over in Bradworthy, for John and Chrissie Rosevear were spending the Sunday with Caleb Vinnicombe. Smiling at the thought of how her lips trembled when the tears came, he drew from his pocket the sad little note he had received from her yesterday. It was a matter of half an hour after that to saddle Merrylegs and be off.

Over the country there lay the stillness of frost, death in the earth grappling with the vital impulse of the cloudless sunlight. The great dome of air, purple with distance and tingling with frost and sunshine, throbbed over the rolling plains where the marshy bottoms gleamed with ice-mirrors, over the valleys grey with hoar-frost, and over the wooded hilltops where the trees caught the glory of the molten sun. The twitter of a half-dead bird from the hedge, the whirring flight of field-fares from a thawing patch of grass-land, the occasional call of snipe or woodcock from the sedge, were the only clear sounds to be distinguished.

It was getting dim when he reached Bradworthy, and tawny circles of light from cottage lamps were beginning to shine like huge glow-worms from the rooms where the women were spreading white tablecloths for tea.

The Rosevears' cottage was dark, and at first Ambrose thought his ride was going to be in vain, but he caught sight of Thyrza sitting by the fire in the house next door. She was balancing the bare pink toes of a baby on her hand, while the little creature moved its body from side to side, in the ecstacy of budding strength. As she held the child, she sang the cuckoo song of the West. In the words of it there came back to Ambrose the memories of his own childhood, for it was from Mrs. Velly that Thyrza had learnt it. In the rush of blood to his heart, he felt the mighty force that sweeps men in the resistless current of creation towards that birth and re-birth by which the purpose of the ages is fulfilled.

"The cuckoo is a fine bird,
He singeth as he flies,
He bringeth us good tidings,
He telleth us no lies.

He sucketh the sweet flowers
To make his fine voice clear,
And when he sings 'cuckoo,'
The summer draweth near,"

sang Thyrza. "Cuckoo! Cuck, cuck!" cried she, placing her lips on the child's, while between the kisses Ambrose could divine the loud breathing that in a healthy baby always accompanies these active movements. But presently the head sank forward with a sleepy murmur against the girl's neck. Patting the round, beflanneled back, Thyrza rocked herself to and fro. "I love to feel 'en give his little snores," she said to the mother, who was bending over the cradle preparing the smooth nest of sheets and pillows.

"My word! it's you that ought to have a dozen," laughed the woman. Then, as they heard the sound of a footstep outside, they both caught sight of Ambrose, Thyrza with the sense of surprise always felt in looking, after absence, on the longed-for face of a friend. With a word of excuse, she got up and joined him.

"Oh," she said, as they walked away, "it seems so long since I left Long Furlong."

At last, as they stood in the darkening fields, covered now in the hollows by a rising mist, he said—

"Look at me, Thyrza."

His look drew her eyelids up, and in her eyes he read the satisfaction for the deepest longing he possessed—the sympathy that can see no wrong in the thing loved. This alone held him to her, and would hold him even against other attractions; for Thyrza saw him as every man likes to be seen, with the weakness hidden and the faults glossed over.

"Dear heart," he asked, "what would make you love me less?"

"Nothing. But I should die if you flung me away."

"But if—I cared for some one else?"

"Then I would come back after she was gone."

"You would? Yes, I really believe you would."

"Don't you know 'tis for always that I love, Ambrose? Nothing—not death even—could take 'ee from me. If I died, I should just be waiting for 'ee, dear, to come."

"But what if there wasn't anything of you to wait, love?"

For answer she laid his hand on her breast. "Can'st hear it beat?" she asked.

"Yes," he whispered.

"'Tis only the body's heart that you feel. But behind that there's another heart of me that lives always, and always for you—in heaven or hell, or at the gates of death."

"Thyrza, Thyrza, what is it?" he cried.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling. "I know deep in me that I cannot die; you cannot die; none can. We must go on and on, often to suffer, often to fall. We cannot die if we would. Never to get away from ourselves. It's awful to think that we cannot die."

"But why do you talk about dying? You are so happy, so merry, in my arms."

"Ah, but you're all to me. And I can't be all to you; no one woman is to any man. God made men to love many, and a woman to love but one. Ah, if I could only die in your arms and never know anything more! For the touch of your arms to be the last of life, the last of feeling——"

"Thyrza, if I came to do wicked things?"

"'Twould still be you. What do I care whether your skin's dirty or clean, when under the skin there's you—the you that holds me."

"But," he said to tease her, "when your roses fade and the lines come and the hair grows grey, what if I don't care then?"

"And," she smiled, "when you're bald and lined, do you think it will make any difference to me? Ah, no. But 'tis different with a man, I know. Even then, there'll still be the other side to look for, the other side of death. And there'll be memories, too."

In the sighing of the wind, the pulsing of the star, the swaying of the tide, lives the love of such as Thyrza; for it gauges the depths, not of human life only, but of the very elements of wind and star and water, for of such affinity was born the universe; deeper is it than the nerves that thrill through the brain, closer than the blood that is pumped through the heart; for it is a force that speaks when nerves and blood are still, as it spoke when human nerves and blood were not, save in creative thought. It is the essence of love itself, this desire of the star for the star, the atom for the atom, the living soul for the soul of life. No thinking can destroy its intangible quality, for it is deeper than the tool of any image-breaker can reach.

Then they turned back to the Rosevears' cottage, and over their meal Thyrza told the story of how she had tramped from farm to farm in search of work. She had, at last, after many a weary pilgrimage, found daily work at a place close by, so that she could still sleep at Chrissie's.

She stood by the open hearth fire, with the flimsy edge of her dress, unperceived, lying close to the burning logs. Suddenly a long flame darted to her waist, and with a cry Ambrose had caught her, and was crushing the fire out with his hands, pressing her against the cloth of his clothes. It was one of the moments that women remember long afterwards, in the years when the glamour of the man's love has faded, in those years when great suffering is not regarded half as anxiously as a hurt finger once was.

At last, when the fire had been extinguished, Ambrose put out the lamp with his scorched hands, and drew her down to him. Through the window pane there twinkled the green ray of a solitary star, and they could hear the night wind wandering round the walls.

As Ambrose held her in the quick breathing of his startled nerves, he said—

"Think what might have happened if I hadn't been here. I want to have you always by me."

"Ambrose, you must go now. You'll be very late home else. Just a minute more and then I shall turn you out."

"I shan't leave you till Chrissie comes."

"She isn't coming to-night, for they'll get a lift home first thing to-morrow morning."

In the upleap of a flame, Thyrza caught sight of his strained face. Still she clung to Chrissie's words, "Let every man be the better for 'ee, not the worse."

Suddenly three curious whistled notes came from outside the window. It was a gay, birdlike sound, and for the last ten days it had awakened Thyrza every morning at five o'clock, when William Bagelhole went to his work. At the sound the lonely longing of those mornings came back to her.

"Oh," she cried, "I want to be strong. 'Tis for you I want it."

"Look outside," he said, pointing to the icy cold of the night; "that's death, the symbol of lovelessness. Can you bear it? With my heart beating for you? Look, Thyrza, look at the flames. Body and soul, who knows the difference when the flames leap in one? And," he whispered, "'tis you women who rule the gates of life that the leaping flame throws open. Thyrza, I saw you with that child in your arms. Do you know what it told me about you? And even now, you are mine."

Still, with her feeble rushlight of intelligence, Thyrza tried to pierce the darkness of the future. Yet, painfully peering into his life, she could only see hers and his together. He would forget his ambitions and settle with her at the farm. Secretly, she believed Mrs. Velly expected that. Besides, how could he fail to know what was best for both? He was so much above her, and Chrissie had only known men like John Rosevear.

"You shall come back to Long Furlong," Ambrose whispered, "and this time we'll be married with a real gold ring."

Soon within the cottage the great silence had fallen. It is always the same silence, whether the city street roars outside, or only the night wind sighs, for it is the silence of a woman's heart that waits. Then Thyrza heard through the stillness a sound like the dripping of water-drops in the depths of a well; it was the curious beating of tiny pulses in herself. At last, that too ceased, and the darkness fell—the darkness that closes the eyelids as with weighted lead, that stretches numbness on soft limbs, that arrests the passage of time.

There was no time for her now, no past that remembered, no future that hoped or feared. It was the endless Now. This point in eternity was eternity, without end, as it had been without beginning. She was the woman soul of the ages. There was no time, no space, no pain, no want, no longing. Little tremors, like the faint touches of the light on aspen leaves, like the quivering wind-gusts on still pools, passed through nerve and brain. Then the silence and the warm darkness, all enveloping, enfolded her in the eternal Now.

* * * * * *

The window panes next morning were squares of sullen light, and the ivy outside the window rustled with the movements of the birds tumbling from boughs and nests.

Thyrza turned in her sleep, and with the turning came a dream.

Peter at the gates of Paradise sternly shaking a key. It was the huge door-key of Hartland Church, and Peter a cruel, bearded, ear-ringed knave. There stood a woman outside the gates with a dim crowd of waiting figures behind her.

Dumbly she implored admittance; sternly he shook the key.

Then she was aware of a great angel behind the grim fisherman.

"I think," said the angel, "I'll see what it's like outside."

And the next moment he, too, stood outside by the woman, whom she knew to be herself.

"Would you come in without—him?" asked the angel.

"Nay, Lord; but where is he?" she stammered.

"Outside," answered the angel curtly.

"Then I stay outside too. I only wanted entry to find him."

Through the bars of the gate the light shone on sunny vistas; without, the cruel wind smote shivering bodies, but she turned away.

Then she looked down at her side, for at the bend of the waist outside her drab clothes, a point of heavenly white curved round tenderly; it was the tip of the angel's wing.

"'Twas where he used to clasp me close when he drew me near, Lord Angel," she said. "Just where the waist grows small."

"Ay," said the angel, "that's why they took out the rib, for a man's close clasping in the tender, old earth-way. I thought you'd like it." Then he laughed, for the angel had a sense of humour.

"There's much love outside," said he to Peter, as he passed within the gates once more.

Then only the wind blew in the chaos outside the gates, as Thyrza awoke to the knowledge of her changed life where there already waited the first gleaning of the harvest of bitterness. For the prayer she had prayed last night was answered, the prayer that whatever pain there was to be borne should be her portion, since where his weakness had called for her strength, it had called in vain. In the one appeal that life had made to her for self-control, she had failed, and in doing so had made the man she loved "think low" of women. Henceforth, save by walking on her own heart, she could never bring him any uplift, for her weakness had dragged down in his eyes the honour of women.

She covered her face with her hands, as though to shut out the knowledge.

In the barn at Long Furlong, where he had thrown himself on the hay after his return, Ambrose, too, awoke at the first daylight. His first thought was of Thyrza, and hurriedly rising, he searched in the dimness for pencil and paper to write her.

"My wife," he wrote, "I want you to have it always before you that nothing can ever come between us now. Never let any fear of the future, any sense of present loneliness trouble you; for, my Thyrza, I am always between you and any sorrow that may threaten you—you, the one great gift of my life. You shall be here at the farm as my wife in a month or two at latest. I would ask for a secret marriage, but there is no need. I only have to accustom my mother to the thought of it, and then you shall come. Have no misgivings, no mistrust. Nothing can ever come between us now."

The face that bent above the paper was hardening into a man's strength. For, here, in the downgrade of the family fortunes, he had, by his own act, made the foothold of all still more precarious. It was the death-blow, as he believed, to his career; for with Thyrza as his wife he must look for work as overseer, or land-agent, if he were very lucky. Yet from all shadow Thyrza should be protected; he would belittle their love by no weak repining, above all, by no vulgarity of callous neglect.

Yet he knew, deep down, whence it never came to the surface, that where the test of a man is his work, the supreme test of a woman is the character of the love she inspires. From that unspoken condemnation, living as it does in the heart of things, no power on earth could free Thyrza, since there can be no bringing back of yesterday.

As Ambrose packed up his tools, meaning never to touch them again, he marvelled at the unknown strength of the force that had arisen against him. In moments of vital choice, something that we never before knew to exist in us leaps to life, something that we gaze at aghast, even while it takes the direction of our destiny into its hands. Ambrose knew this, but he was still unaware of the fact that this something is the self our visions have framed; but from the darkness where we bred it, it comes, created by the desires we have cherished and the thought-shapes we have formed. In the memory of yesterday Ambrose's fancies flew again, in this fresh proof of the Velly degeneracy, to those ancestors of his who long ago had been men of sterling honour. In a measure, his letter was an offering to their Manes, though born of his tender pity for Thyrza.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRAYER OF WOMEN

IN the larch plantation through which Thyrza was passing on her way home from work, the touches of spring were becoming visible, for she had now been staying in Bradworthy for nearly three months. She walked slowly, for this was the usual trysting-place with Ambrose, whom she expected to meet to-day.

In front of her, vistas of green shadow stretched, while along the avenue between the trees lay a pathway of sunlight across the carpet of moss. From the lower branches of the trees hung hoary lichens, like the ancient memories that thrill in the glance of the youngest child. The air was filled with the murmur of numberless tiny water-courses pushing their way through beds of moss and, where the trees had been slightly cleared, the mist of sunlight gathered in pools of topaz shadow. Like the ghost of a sound, from the branches above came the faint roar of the wind, never insistent, but always there like the unseen power of fate. Under the trailing brambles a primrose peeped from the huge leaves that woodland shadows always encourage in this plant, and as she stooped to pick it she saw Ambrose Velly at the end of the avenue.

They stood for a moment hand in hand, each seeking silently for courage to break through the strange loneliness that enwraps even those who love.

"Turn back," he said at last, "and let us stay here until it's time for you to be going home. Chrissie won't be expecting you yet, for it's quite early."

On the fallen trunk of a log he laid his coat for her. Then again a silence fell between them, till, laying his hand across hers, he asked, "Thyrza, what's troubling you? For there is something, I'm sure; you've never met me like this before."

"And," she smiled, "you've something too. Tell yours first."

"No; yours," he persisted.

"You know what you wrote about our marriage," she said in a low voice, looking down at her hands as she spoke; "you said in a month or two at latest."

"That brings me straight to my trouble my Thyrza. Have you wondered why, in the times we've met since, I've never said a word about it?"

She was silent, but he knew it was because she would utter nothing that seemed like a reproach.

"It is just the weakest point in me that you have struck now," he said. "You remember how I skulked about for days like a tail-piped dog, because I knew mother wanted to send you away? It's the same now. Every word that I wrote, I meant—and mean it now. You are my own wife, in my eyes; but just now I cannot add any more burdens to what my mother already has to bear. Thyrza, you must not ask it of me."

"That means," she said, in a hard voice, "that you break your word—that we cannot be married."

He took her cold hands in his and drew her closer.

"Not yet," he said. Then, as she quivered, he watched her closely, for indeed, it was a hard thing to tell her the truth, to strike the brightness from her face and see the leaden look of misery dawn instead. "I want you to face things straight, child," he said tenderly. "My mother is making a fight against terrible odds, against odds that she knows nothing of, poor soul. Ask yourself, Thyrza, whether her son can add another mite of pain to the load she carries."

"You should have thought of that months ago, Ambrose," she said, disengaging herself from him. Leaning forward with eyes that saw nothing of the scene in front of her, she was watching the cloud, now no bigger than a man's hand, that was gathering over all her future.

"My heavens, I know, I know!" said Ambrose, as he paced restlessly to and fro; "but we mustn't lose our heads—we must think of every one and everything."

"Except me," she said, shivering, as an animal contracts its muscles at a hostile touch.

"That's devilish unfair," he said angrily, and then checking himself, continued quietly, "At home we're at our last gasp, and mother's fighting with her back to the wall, which is undermined beneath her very feet, though she doesn't know it. We shall have to leave in less than six months now, for father's had notice to quit, though he won't have her told. There will have to be a sale then, when she knows, to pay for the more pressing debts. My Thyrza," he said, holding her to him, "I want you to be brave, and not add any weakness to me now. I want every ounce of fight there is in me. Little one, you are the dearest thing I have; but not even for you can I aim another blow at mother. She almost starves herself, as it is, for the debts are adding up. And father knows too, and for whole days at a time he'll sit never moving from his chair, or what's worse, he'll go wandering over the fields he'll soon have to leave. He's sober mostly; but how can I bring you there?"

"What are you going to do, when the end comes, then?" asked Thyrza, listening to the muffled beatings of her heart. "I didn't know—I didn't know how bad it was, Ambrose."

"How could I write such things?" he said impatiently. "But directly they're settled in a cottage, I must get away to some architect's office. I've a good all-round knowledge of country work, and I've written to my old chief already. Then, when I've got work, you shall come to me."

"Oh, no; oh, no," she cried, with breathless sobs; "I'd shame 'ee. I'm only fit for rough country ways. I thought you'd always be on a farm, where I do belong."

"Thyrza," he whispered, "can you forget so easily?"

"Forget! Ah, my God, 'tis you who've forgotten."

"Thyrza, there is no reason, is there, why we should be married openly at once? No reason that makes it necessary for you, I mean. Tell me, my own. Tell me frankly."

Praying blindly for strength to lie, she held her breath for a moment, thinking of the weight of his trouble, gauging her own strength to endure, calculating where she could count on help. In a moment she saw the bright eyes of the bird that had watched her from the ivy, when she awoke to the desire that all the pain of their sin might be hers. Then she lifted her eyes to her lover's as they gazed intently at her.

"No, Ambrose," she said in clear tones that sounded in her own ears like a defiance to fate. "I know what you mean, but there is no reason for me. I will wait and be brave till you can take me openly."

The last words were very low, for, indeed, the future was full of terror for her. But as she looked in his thankful face, she would gladly have repeated the lie a hundred times.

"I'll never add so much as a straw to your trouble, Ambrose," she cried; "'tisn't in me to do it. For there's nothing in the world I wouldn't bear for 'ee."

As Ambrose watched the brave light in her eyes, he felt as though the mountain wind of self-reliance was blowing through him. It was almost a shock to him to find in Thyrza the strong helpmate that is sometimes born out of passion in an erring woman.

"Do you know," he said, "that at first I thought I must put all my ambitious thoughts aside?"

She knew what he meant, in the intelligence that love and pain were bringing, and shivered again at the thought of the widespread evil she had so nearly wrought in him.

"Come," he continued; "you're cold. Let's get out of this. Come out into the field. But now I know that such a notion was the greatest folly. Why, I should feel like a sea-gull with its wings clipt, if I were tied to a farm. Just think of the dreary second-best of all the years, and there might be forty or fifty of them! 'Twouldn't be bearable. I wish you could understand, child, how I long to see the thing that my brain begot showing in the face of men. I want to realise myself—oh! if I only could. Lord!"—he laughed—"what a fool I am to ramble on like this."

They were crossing the field now, and in the distance Thyrza could already see the stile where Ambrose always left her, lest they should be seen together by any of the people of the village.

"Tell me," she said. "I want to understand."

"Thyrza," he answered, stopping suddenly, "just think what it must be to have secretly seen in your mind a beautiful thing that no one else has any idea of. And then to tell it out plainly to all the world. Why," he laughed, as he looked at her, "it's like——"

But her eyes were fixed in the glance of a sleep-walker.

"'Tis like," she said, "when a woman sees the child that her love gave her."

"Thyrza," he cried, as they stood by the stile, "why, I've never seen you like this! You were always a little pigeon that I love, but now, you understand."

"Ay, Ambrose; more than once I thought I would, and if ever you feel like thinking hardly o' me, remember that there wasn't anything as went deeper than the love of you—and yours," she added in a lower voice.

With a long kiss they parted, and Ambrose stood for a long while watching her; but she never turned back to look, lest he should see her sick white face. Yet she thanked God that she had found courage to lie; for the little sun-lover was a woman now, with a woman's sorrowful courage to bear the lot she had chosen.

Ambrose would not follow till Thyrza was safe in Chrissie's cottage, for he was anxious to shield her from all possibility of gossip. But as he turned on his heel to return to the wood, a man got up from the hedge and came towards him. It was John Darracott, evidently on tramp, for by the side of the hedge was a bundle in a handkerchief at the end of the stick by which it had been carried.

"Hullo, Darracott, that you?" said Ambrose, affecting an ease that he was far from feeling. "I heard you were leaving the Quay, but I didn't know it was to come to Bradworthy."

The moment the words were out of his mouth he recognised that they sounded like a sneer.

"I hope you'll have better luck," he finished, feeling a slight tinge of contempt at remembering how Darracott had given his false evidence at the Board of Trade enquiry with the uncompromising directness of an accomplished liar. Yet the poor devil must have suffered, too, thought Ambrose, noticing the whitening of his hair and beard.

"I'm deuced thankful," he said to himself, in a glow of self-approval, "that I didn't add a stone to the heaps he's had flung at him."

"I'm not going of my own free will," said Darracott. "Master give me notice, but I've got work to Appledore, at the gravel-loading."

At that very moment a farm-cart heaped with his bits of furniture was rumbling along the Bideford road, on its way to the coast. But his longing to see Thyrza once had brought him to Bradworthy. Now he carried with him the picture of her with her head on Ambrose Velly's shoulder, her whole attitude that of complete surrender.

"Stop a bit, sir," he said, as Ambrose was for leaving him; "I've a word to say to 'ee."

In the tone, even more than the words, there was antagonism, but the younger man held himself well in hand.

"Now, Darracott," said he, with a laugh, "I know that you watch over Thyrza Braund like an old hen with one chick; but all the same, you know, nobody ever constituted you her guardian. You aren't her godfather, I suppose, by any chance, are you?"

"Believe it or not, as you please," said Darracott savagely, "but I've not so much as set eyes on her till to-night, not since you seed me with her last. Would to God I'd watched her day and night afore she'd come to this!"

"Perhaps," said Ambrose in a cutting tone, "I'd better say at once that whatever construction your foul thoughts may have put on what you saw, Thyrza Braund——"

"I know well that she's no wanton; but if all's straight in your mind, why aren't you courting her open? For you're not. You're not! And if others saw you and her together, same as I did, where's her good name gone?"

The truth in the man's words stung, but Ambrose concealed his annoyance.

"What a trusty old watch-dog you are," he said. "Anyhow, a kiss or two won't do Thyrza any harm. I'll warrant she knew what they were like before I taught her. 'Twas only by the merest chance I met her to-day."

"That's a foul lie!" said Darracott. "And Thyrza Braund never would ha' kissed any man that way without she'd given him her whole heart and soul. And that I'd go to hell to prove. You're lying to me as, I make no doubt, you've lied to her!"

The deep breathing of the two men panted for a second through the sudden gloom that was gathering from the thunder-clouds all round. Then Ambrose crashed his fist at Darracott's face, and the two men grappled, rocking to and fro for a second, each trying to get a secure grip. Curiously enough it was Ambrose that was the calmer of the two, for Darracott's heart was bursting with mingled pity and rage. But at last the stronger man lifted the lighter off his feet, and in another second would have given him a back-fall had not a sudden sense of the shame of it all arrested the movement of every muscle.

Quietly Darracott set his enemy down, and struck up his arm as Ambrose would have aimed a second blow at him.

"Quiet, sir, quiet," he said, drawing deep breaths. "What's the good of going at it like mad bulls? We're making matters worse."

They stood at gaze for a second, till at last Ambrose held out his hand.

"You've done me," he said; "or you would have in another second. I'm sorry, Darracott, I've given you pain. But I love her as honestly as you do, I believe."

"Thank God for that, sir," said Darracott in a low voice. "But ye donno how easy 'tis to smirch the honour of a maid."

It was with a pang, half of shame, half of relief, that

Ambrose recognised the man's simple belief in Thyrza's honesty. He evidently knew nothing, surmised nothing more than a concealed courtship.

"And I've acted wrong," continued Darracott sadly; "for all the anger can do naught but make things worse. You'll act true to her, sir; for there's men as would give their very life for one minute of her love, same as you've had to-night."

"Darracott, I will," said Ambrose; "I never meant anything else. She'll be my wife as soon as I can manage. Only you maddened me so, I wouldn't say it. For I don't want the whole story noised about by all the gossips of the place."

"No gossip will come from me," said Darracott quietly.

So they parted, and Darracott turned his back on the village. At the end of an hour his face was in the other direction, and by night he was back in Hartland; for he could not leave Thyrza helpless and alone. His hatred for Ambrose had evaporated; but he felt that the lad was somehow in a tangle from which he would not have strength to extricate himself. Yet he must be forced to declare his engagement to Thyrza, to make it no longer a hole and corner business. How this was to be done, Darracott had not the faintest idea; the only thing he knew was that he could not go away. To his employer at Appledore he wrote that his place must be filled up, if need be, for he could not arrive for some days, possibly weeks. In the simplicity of his great love there was no sense that he was interfering in what was no concern of his, for to him everything to do with Thyrza was his affair.

As Ambrose rode back to Long Furlong, through the storm that was coming up against the wind, he remembered that he must be especially careful of the mare, Merrylegs, for she was already practically sold and belonged to him no longer. This meant that riding would soon be a thing of the past for him, and Thyrza and he farther apart than ever. The sale of Merrylegs was thus a symbol of that estranging power of mere circumstance that aids and abets our frailties with a truly diabolic power.

All the while, with Chrissie singing cheerily in the room below, Thyrza lay listening to the noise of the thunder, gathering strength to act alone, as she had never acted before; for Chrissie's song seemed to remind her how detached each soul is from the one next to it, since Chrissie could sing, with Thyrza facing untold dread.

Yet the child who once was Thyrza felt that she was listening to another song, the great melody of love and sacrifice that was carrying her on its wings to heights she had never dreamt of in all her sunny life. For in her loving lie for Ambrose Velly's sake, in the mystery of birth that was coming to her, her soul was opening to the world of awe where dwell the starry wonders of the universe, where are the laws that bind Orion and the Pleiades, that link the meanest with the greatest in the common reverence of life. In shame borne for the man she loved, Thyrza was finding her soul, learning the law of life that came to Ambrose as the fruit of his brain, and to Darracott as the fruit of sacrifice. Thus watching the Mystery Play of a woman's life, she fell asleep, fearless of the thunder for the first time in her life. Yet, before she slept, there flamed along her heart silence the thought of the wonderful PRAYER OF WOMEN, though its actual words she could only have understood with difficulty—

O Spirit that broods upon the hills
And moves upon the face of the deep,
And is heard in the wind,
Save us from the desire of men's eyes,
And the cruel lust of them.

Later on that evening Mr. Velly stood at the entrance to the farm of Lower Titchberry. The light overhead was livid, and the stifling air as hot as a furnace, while the upper branches of the tallest elms swayed slightly, bowing before the wings of the coming storm. Dim shadows streaked with tawny lights were moving across the sky.

"Better wait, Velly, till the storm's blown over," said the farmer, as he watched his visitor trying to mount the shivering animal from the heppen-stock.

"Quiet, lass, quiet," said James Velly, as the terrified creature quivered at every rattle of the storm overhead.

"'Tis pretty nigh madness," repeated the farmer, "to ride her in a storm like this. Best get under the shelter of a roof."

"Damn you, stand still," said Mr. Velly to the mare, as he at last managed to swing himself into the saddle. In the dim light his face shone white and set.

As he turned down the road the whole country was lit with a vast sheet of yellow light, against which the houses stood outlined in ink for a second. Far off on the coast the steely sea yawned in the black cliff chasms. The mare reared, but Velly struck her a savage blow that made her quiver with pain. Shaking his head forebodingly, the master of Titchberry stood watching the horse and rider as they thundered down the road, till there came the rush of a curtain of rain, and he went indoors for shelter.

Faster and faster in the rattle of hoof-beats James Velly was escaping from thought, from the endless vain regrets at the waste of his life. On him was the sense of headlong flight from the sodden dreariness of these last weeks. He shouted again and again in the relief of overcharged nerves, till the mare, too, grew beside herself, for with starting eyeballs and sweating flanks she was fleeing from the terror of the opening skies above. At last in James

Velly's brain there was nothing left but the joy of this headlong rush, so different from the sickening despair with which he had again and again handled his rabbiting gun.

"Ambrose," cried Mrs. Velly, as her son came in dripping wet from Bradworthy, "your father's not home yet. He went to Titchberry two hours ago."

"Well, mother, I reckon he's waiting till this downpour's over. There's nothing to be alarmed at in that. I'm wet to the skin myself."

He left his mother looking out on the storm in a rare fit of idleness; there seemed to be a terrible message, indeed, in the black shadows that filled the house with darkness. Suddenly amid the sounds of the storm, above the swirl of the rain and the rushing of the shoots, there came a crash from the house itself. Then followed the awe-stricken silence that falls on inanimate things after some great detonation.

"The house is struck," said Ambrose, hurrying down from his room.

His first idea was that a chimney had fallen, and he rushed into the yard, while Mrs. Velly ran upstairs, where all was just as usual. At last Ambrose thought of the eight-day clock in the hall that, with its solemn tick-tack, had measured out the moments of many generations of the Velly family. Opening the panel he looked inside.

"Come here, mother," he said, pointing to the interior, where the great pendulum no longer swayed.

"It's fallen," exclaimed Mrs. Velly.

Across the minds of both flashed the belief that the falling of a clock weight is as sure a sign of approaching death as the beating of a wild bird against the windows of a house.

The storm was travelling further away, but through the wash of falling rain they began to distinguish a distant sound. At first it was as slight as the rhythmic cry of a man under the influence of an anæsthetic. Then it became louder, more insistent; it was the noise of galloping hoofs, and as it came nearer they could distinguish the furious terror of the pace.

It was Clover, the mare his father rode, riderless now, as Ambrose knew she would be, when he ran out of the house.

"Go and fetch Vinnicombe, and take a gate off its hinges," said Mrs. Velly quietly, as Ambrose led in the mare, covered with foam-spots, and reeking with the sweat of intense fear.

"It'll be along the road from Titchberry," she said, as she started off, bareheaded, in the rain.

Twenty times before she reached the heap of stones where lay the huddled mass she was expecting, she fancied the dark marks on the road must be her husband. At last she found him.

There were faint bubbles coming from the nostrils, and blood was flowing from a scalp-wound. She feared to move him at first, but when the men arrived with the gate, they found her sitting with his head on her lap, the wound carefully bound with strips of petticoat.

"He's gone," she said quietly. "He sighed twice. Clover killed him," she repeated dully, like one repeating a lesson.

At first she would not let them touch the body, pressing her strained face against the breast of the dead man. It was Caleb who induced her to move.

"Missus," he said, kneeling down by her side, "he was coming home sober."

"Ay, he died sober," she said, and burst into tears.

"Thank God," said Ambrose, putting his arm round her and lifting her to her feet.

The rain had ceased and the road was beginning to glitter with the freshness of a newly-washed surface, the scent of the hedges and fields became perceptible and the faint twittering of birds began from the trees.

"It's come too late," said Mrs. Velly, looking round at the peace. "The storm's done its work. If he had but come home an hour later," she said, for she felt at the moment but the regret with which one looks at a broken dish: 'if only I had not put it at the edge,' one says.

After they had brought him home and Dr. Dayman had left, she sat quietly with Ambrose in the kitchen, opening the pocket-book she had found on the body.

"So that's the end," she said, passing to her son the first letters he found, which was the one her husband had received from the landlord.

"Yes, mother, I suppose it is," assented Ambrose, as he read it.

"And all the time I thought 'twas but two years' rent owing. But it's too late now to think of blaming him."

"I'll pay it all back, mother," said Ambrose, catching up the letter. "Some day I shall be well able to. Nobody shall lose a penny by me or my father." He squared his shoulders with a new sense of responsibility, of strength, even of freedom, though he loyally reproached himself for the feeling.

"You'll be able to go away now, Ambrose," said Mrs. Velly quietly. "Lad, do you know what I'm thinking of to-night, with him lying upstairs?"

"Of him as he was years ago, I expect," said Ambrose gently.

"I'm thanking God that James Velly's dead and Ambrose, his son, is alive. Ay, James Velly's dead, thank God; but Ambrose is his resurrection. No, I'm not mad, I'm not mad, boy. Come here," she said, pulling him down to the flags till he crouched at the side of her chair; "listen to me. The dead don't die, not always. They live in their children. James Velly is alive in you. Oh, my God, to win the battles he lost—in you. You must be strong where he was weak, must stand where he fell."

"Mother, what is it?"

"Lad, it's the passion of a life-time that's speaking. I loved a strong man, a man no slave to his own weakness, and James Velly failed me. I hated 'en one way and loved 'en another. I want you to win for 'en, gain for 'en, be strong for 'en. I loved him as I love you; you and he's one, dear—one to me, somehow."

"Mother, I will not fail you."

"You must go and see the land agent and ask him to wait for the rent. It'll take us years, but it shall be done. His master can afford to wait better than the others. There'll have to be a sale of furniture as well as stock. They'll find good old things, too, that ought to make a pretty penny."

"Mother, it's hard for you," Ambrose burst out, for Mrs. Velly had always been a houseproud woman. "But that'll most likely pay the other debts and more."

"There shan't be a penny owing to any one in the end. Never mind for me. I can get a two-roomed cottage and live on next to nothing."

Then she broke down suddenly. "Eh, lad, lad," she cried; "but it'll not bring back the years of happiness that James missed. I mind the sunny afternoons he'd take me driving before Janie came."

She was crying the rare, slow tears of a strong woman, bitter like a man's.

"But," she said at last, "you'll have the happiness that didn't last with him. You'll be the strong man he never was. And there's one thing escaped, for that would have been sheer ruin. I sent Thyrza away, thank God. Now you'll be able to go to the work your heart's set on, free from the troubles there might have been round your neck."

As no man has ever tracked the eagle's flight that marks the height of human strength, so no man has ever touched the bed-rock of human weakness. Fresh vistas of degradation must always open before the most degraded, for at each successive fall the depths below seem fathomless.

Ambrose knew this in a moment, when he heard his mother say—

"You haven't seen her since she left, have 'ee, lad?"

He answered, after a pause—

"No, mother."

To Ambrose human needs were the strongest of all arguments, but he was powerless to weigh the opposing claims of his mother and Thyrza. Only to-day, in the bitterness of such a death as his father's, he felt that a bare denial could do Thyrza little harm. He knew himself now to be, like all living things, on a slippery inclined plane, on which one rose an inch or two to fall the next second many feet. He just caught a momentary glimpse of possibilities of baseness in himself that before to-night he could never have imagined, for it was a relief to know that Darracott was gone from the place. Yet, the next second, he found himself thinking that Thyrza would be terrified at the thunderstorm; for her name was truly written on Ambrose Velly's heart, though in the strange hidden writing that only becomes legible in the heat of the fire.

CHAPTER XII

A STRONG MAN ARMED

"I REMEMBER so well," said Damaris Westaway, "how you used to tie your old dressing-gown round you and screw yourself up over your work, because we could only afford one fire in the house. That was before the money came, and now you want to go back and live like that again."

She was sitting with her father in the study, looking out on the garden in its spring glories of daffodils and crocuses. It was during the week that followed Mr. Velly's death.

"I don't want you to give up anything you value, my child," said Mr. Westaway; "yet, for myself, there is but one way to be even honest."

"Do you know what I did when the money came?" asked Damaris. "I just went off and bought what I'd always longed for—a silk petticoat and frillies and silver-backed brushes and fur and lace. And when the things came home I sat on the floor and cried for joy. You see it shames a woman to be shabby. It makes her feel more degraded than vice."

"Do you know," said Mr. Westaway, putting a hand on her head, as she leant against the arm of his chair, "that it was the thought of how you would miss your pretty things that troubled me most? My dear, you mustn't go without——"

"What my soul loveth, neither of savoury meat, nor of finery," she laughed; "yet, father, there are things that even a woman values more than show and dress. I value your peace of mind, your honesty, more than delicate lace and silk, father. Even I do that. For I understand quite well how you think it not common honesty to get money out of those who toil for you, who give them nothing that has cost you a single effort and a single thought. For the capital you never gained; it was the merest chance of relationship that put such a weapon in your hand against the workers who must have the use of it or they die. Oh, I'm like most women, I hate socialism; it's uncomfortable, like the Sermon on the Mount. Only I've enough imagination to see that when it's got into your very bones, there's no escape from it."

"But it is you, after all, who will have the greater part of the discomfort."

"Oh, that's always the case with men's little ways, and there's no denying that show means more to us women than to men. By nature, a woman is timid. She feels herself weak against the masterfulness of man, for he has such strong nerves, such a steady frame. But put her in good clothes and she has a weapon of confidence at once. The light will come back to her eyes and the spring to her walk and she'll twinkle in the eyes of the next overbearing man she meets—and master him."

"A glass of wine or a dinner does that for a man," said Mr. Westaway, with a smile. "He, as Ambrose would say, 'bucks up.'"

"Father, are you going to do anything for him?" asked Damaris, eagerly. "Surely now is the time to do it, now that he is free to get away."

"I'm going to pay a premium to put him in a good office, and to get him a good position in it, too. A country office, I think; for I don't want his originality swamped at once with the example or the overtaught opinions of much older men."

"To do things like that," said Damaris, with shining eyes, "I'd dress in sackcloth ever more. And I often think, when I rustle about in my grand clothes, that they put a bar between me and the real people."

She was thinking tenderly of the weak things of the world, more especially of a little illegitimate child whom she had come across in a hospital. His father, another Ambrose, more careful of his chance-born brat than is customary, used to come to the ward to see the child. One day the boy in the next bed was heard to say, "Oh, he's got no father, he's only got an Ambrose."

If her father's wealth was to go to the poor folks, who have "only an Ambrose," she was well content to go without silk and lace. This, indeed, she understood far better than the abstract dogmas of comparative theology.

Mr. Westaway watched his daughter with a comfort in her growing sympathy, yet with a half-dread of her youthful impetuosity. For, he knew, with a half-smile, that she would, if she adopted his ideas, want to hurl him into action before he had half weighed the pros and cons of it. Indeed, Mr. Westaway, notwithstanding his boldness in the world of ideas, had all the habitual dislike of the old man to hurried action; there were days, in fact, when, as Damaris said, he would hesitate about walking down the garden path for fear of treading on a worm.

"But how," asked Damaris, "even if one thinks as you do, that one must spend nothing on oneself beyond bare necessaries, can one detach oneself sufficiently from the whirring wheel in which we are all caught? How can we go counter to the whole world?"

"Yes," said Dr. Dayman, coming in and throwing himself into a chair, "that's just what I should like to know. What are you going to do with your money?"

"I propose to hand over the bulk of my capital to endow and support a novel kind of hospital."

"Faugh," said the doctor.

"Wait a minute. I call it hospital, for want of a better name. It will be an institution, set up in one of the most densely populated parts of London, to minister to the wants of women and children during the first two years of the child's life. It will teach the mothers, as well as give medicine, food, and nursing; for there will be a trained staff, who will supplement the work of the Maternity Hospital, from which the mothers are turned out long before they are ready to struggle again with life. I hope it will be the forerunner of many such institutions, for it is the great way in which the municipalities can help the future generations."

Mr. Westaway's eyes glowed with the supreme bliss of the creator, for the scheme was the one thing that had given him courage to persist in the face of clerical gossip in a course of action which had come like a cataclysm into his quiet life.

"Father," asked Damaris, "what in the world has stirred you up like this?"

"Ay," said Dr. Dayman, "that's just what I want to know."

"You ought to know, Dayman," said the Vicar quietly.

"Confound it all, who am I to see flies through a brick wall? I tell you, you're a stranger to me. You were once a decent, silk-hatted, no, clerical-hatted citizen, and now, though you look the same——"

"No, he doesn't," laughed Damaris; "for his hair stands up straighter."

"Yet you have the key in your hand, doctor," said Mr.

Westaway; "don't you remember telling me that I wasn't a very long-lived man? There's some heart-weakness, Damaris."

"Oh, my father," she cried, kneeling suddenly by his side.

"Oh, it's nothing of immediate importance, my dear. But I've always wanted to feel that I had given something, done something, that had cost me effort and struggle. One puts off everything when one fancies there's a long time to do it in. And now, if the time's shortening, I want to see the thing done. I've always felt that for me to show a little charity and preach a few sermons meant nothing. It was easier than doing wrong, in fact. Now I want to do a good hard thing, something that I've to set my jaws hard over."

"Damn!" bellowed the doctor. "I feel like a dying chorister. No more to be trusted with a parish, *or* a daughter, *or* an income, than a monkey with a Maxim gun."

But Damaris paid no attention.

"Father," she exclaimed, "let me help. I'll keep house on next to nothing, if you'll only let me go and help weigh the babies. They would be weighed, wouldn't they, Dr. Dayman?"

Both men laughed, for Damaris would have cheerfully upset every one for a baby's comfort any day.

"I shan't be able to live in town, Damaris," said Mr. Westaway, "and as Beckland hasn't found a tenant, I thought of removing there."

"Beckland!" exclaimed Damaris, thinking with dismay of the desolate, half-ruined coast farmhouse, long uninhabited and far off the main roads. It was her first taste of the reality of the change that was coming into her life, and for a moment, to her own chagrin, she found it an effort to choke back childish tears. But her father never noticed in his absorption.

"Will you help me, Dayman?" he asked. "I want you and Damaris to be the executors after I'm gone. Somehow there seem to be strangely detached human beings without tentacles, who fasten themselves to no one, and you are the only man I could ask to do it. Damaris will weigh the babies and bring the love, you'll supply the business side."

"And the other day," said the doctor, evading the question, "you were talking about the discipline of suffering. Now here you are trying to take the discipline away from a lot of poor wretches."

Dr. Dayman thoroughly enjoyed the part of devil's advocate.

"It's only what you have been doing all your life," said Damaris.

"I'm paid for it," snapped the doctor. "But if suffering is the best discipline for the character, what's the good of trying to bring about the Millennium? For, if you remove want, banish pain, and improve people up to such a standard that they all rush to bear each other's burdens, what becomes of the training of the character? I say that the man who gives his fellows a deuced bad time of it is a benefactor of the species, and your philanthropist or your man of science is the devil in sheep's clothing. Take anæsthetics now; what a lot of discipline a man misses who has his leg off without chloroform. And what a pity to deprive a man of the spiritual help he would gain by going through life with the cross of a crooked back. These worshippers of pain and weakness, in stole and alb, that you're turning your back on, Westaway, are the true thinkers."

"But," said Damaris, "surely both churchmen and scientists aim at reforming the world, only not in the same way? I don't see that the thinking of one is any straighter than that of the other."

"Ay," said Dr. Dayman with a sneer; "they're every man-jack of 'em bent on reform, one with wry-necked saints and dried-up virgins, and t'other with germ-theories, sterilisation and eugenics. But neither, thank heaven, has the ghost of a chance of accomplishing it, as long as human nature is made of what it is."

"What's that?" said Damaris, who loved to spur the doctor to a rampage at things in general.

"Of the lust of the flesh for bed-rock and the pride of life for top-dressing. Now I ask you, as a reasonable woman, can antiseptic gloves or church millinery affect either of these?"

"They can modify them, for we're certainly different from primitive man, Dayman," said Mr. Westaway.

"There's not a tittle of evidence to prove that we're better in brains or morals than the so-called savages. The high-water mark reached ages ago has never been surpassed or even equalled in the last three centuries of history. No, no; the true symbol of man is the serpent with his tail in his mouth. Round and round we go. That's the true vicious circle. From the highest we fall to lower and lower, and then up again. We're getting to the lowest now. In fact, I think we're starting up again once more in the old way, for it's monkey-tricks that the decadents are, the true arboreals leaping from branch to branch of the rotten upas of the city. We've two things yet to learn, to remove human waste decorously, and to prevent the reproduction of the unfit. Then we can go on, merrily breeding a race of contented hogs, fattening 'em in graduated temperatures on patent foods, and removing their carcasses by scientific machinery. And it's the happiest time ever known on earth," said the doctor, describing a sudden volte-face, "and will be happier yet. For contented hogs are a damned sight better than discontented satyrs like the artists we once had."

"And so," said Mr. Westaway, "we shall soon have no discipline of suffering?"

"Not if you and your like have their will," said the doctor, "and drive wise people like myself on the mad race of the contented swine."

"There would still," said Damaris quietly, "be the most refined suffering possible, the rebellion against the laws of the sty, the disgust at the hog state."

"Ay, you're right," said Dr. Dayman; "that's where Shaw diatribes come from, and why people listen to 'em."

"But," said Damaris, "I deny your original hypothesis. They're there, it's true, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, but they are there only that we may learn to choose those other things that are more excellent—sacrificing love, high enthusiasm, noble effort. Under these we can trample the pride of life and the lust of the flesh. And so, father," she said, getting up and turning to Mr. Westaway, "tomorrow I'm going to walk over to Beckland, for that will be a trampling on the pride of life for me. And I shall ask Ambrose Velly to come with me, so that I can tell him what you're planning for him, if I may."

"And," said Dr. Dayman to himself, as she left the room, "though she talks like a book, she knows no more of life than—her father. But she's a fine creature, is Princess Damaris."

Then he turned to discuss the business arrangements of the future with Mr. Westaway, for he was determined that a suitable income should be settled on Damaris before Mr. Westaway began to play ducks and drakes with his capital.

As Ambrose and Damaris stood outside the long, two-storeyed, slate-roofed house at Beckland on the afternoon of the following day, it seemed to the girl exactly the place for a dreary experiment. In truth, she was not without a feminine joy in martyrdom as she contemplated the tangle of wild angelica, the "billery trade" of the North Devon hedger that filled the garden. The cold light from a cloudy spring sky gleamed on the leaden surfaces of the window-panes that faintly revealed the bareness of the whitewashed walls and stone-flagged floors within. A strip of sea lay beyond the headland of Wimbury, on which the circular remains of a pre-historic village could still be traced. Dense woodland filled the combe to the right, and two tall sycamore trees partly cut off the view from the sea. The wind was playing in a rattling chimney-pot as they brushed the rank growths of the garden with their feet, and over the front door the snails had wound a shiny pattern. Behind the house was a semi-circular dovecote, from which wild pigeons peeped through the holes that pierced the cob-walls like the portholes of a ship. Beyond this was a wilderness of barns, with the thatch tumbling inward in patches of moss-grown rottenness. The beams of these ancient structures stuck out from the yellow cob like black bones out of aged flesh. Two cottages, from one of which rose a thin line of blue-grey smoke, stood close by a scummy duck pond.

"Let's go and see if they'll let us sit by their fire a bit," said Ambrose, thinking his companion looked wan and tired.

"You're kindly welcome," said the old man who answered their knock. "'Tisn't a many folks that come down along this way."

In a moment they were sitting by a cheerful blaze and looking through the deep-set window at the sea. The dressers were loaded with china, and the walls had blossomed out into a wilderness of funeral cards and worked samplers, recording the dates of the deaths and births of relatives.

"Iss," said the old man, looking chirpily round at his comfortable mausoleum, "there's nobody lived to Beckland since my Sal died, and I give up living in the old place to come to this here cottage. 'Tis cosier-like than that ugly barn." He jerked a contemptuous thumb towards the farm. "'Tis a poor, little, small sort of place, but my Sal made a braave lot of money out of it."

"How did she do that?" asked Damaris.

Old Josh Grylls had a voice that whistled in his throat like the sound of a wind that has gone astray for centuries in an ancient chimney.

"Lord-a-mussy, my dear, her had a saving soul," said he, "and never lost a tooth, nor missed a market-day till her laid up four year agone with brown-titus and went off sudden. A wonderful good manager was Sally. Us never seed a fresh egg nor a sound cabbage upon table if her could find a stale one."

"And my father," said Damaris as they turned away from Beckland, "is going to live in the same house as that old skinflint."

"He'll drive out the spirit of old Sally," said Ambrose, "if ever any man could."

On the way out Damaris had told him of what her father proposed to do to help him, and in the first elation of the prospect opening before him, not even Beckland could depress Ambrose. Yet, as he looked back, he said—

"I do wish you weren't going there. It isn't the right shell for you, somehow."

"Yet don't blame my father. For I feel with him, that a man must live out the faith that is in him if he is to be a man at all. And as for women, I suppose their cravings seldom reach a height where they could be called faiths. At any rate, mine don't yet. So don't blame him."

It was such a relief to feel the comrade in Ambrose that she spoke out all her thoughts, without pausing to discuss the question of that discretion of which the English-woman is usually so careful that she has made herself the most inane talker in Europe.

"I couldn't blame him, after what you've told me to-day. Oh, if only I could make you see how it has opened the future for me! But I can't. I've dreamt and dreamt and seen visions for so many years."

Damaris watched him as he walked by her side, all the swing of excitement in his gait and the light of the future shining in his face. Visions and dreams amid all the sordid realities of Long Furlong, she thought—what an idealist he must be! Yet she knew that Mr. Westaway chiefly valued him for a certain satiric capacity for mocking false pretensions.

"But the visions aren't real to me yet," he said suddenly, whirling her off with youth's egotism into the centre of his own problems.

"How do you mean?" asked Damaris.

"Why, this. When you look out at the cliffs before the sun's high, you know how the shadows, solid shadows, fill the ravines, don't you? How the light flashes full into the upper halves of the chasms?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's solid, it casts shadows, it catches the sunlight. That's the way I must see the things I want to plan. I want 'em solid. I want to know how they look in the evening, when the shadows lengthen, how they look when the first light catches them. That's what I want. When I can do that, I shall be ready to begin."

"Yet are you sure? Because what you see might be as clear to you as Hartland Lighthouse, and yet it might be as mean as a squalid row of tenement houses. You must remember that we're a great nation; we're populous, rich, and healthier and cleaner than any nation has ever been.

Yet we can't give you a church or a statue that any sane person would want to sit in front of for half an hour. We're neat, clean, sanitary and policemanised. We've main drains and water systems, and yet all our schools cannot give us an inspired fiend like Cellini."

Ambrose had never even heard the name of the great goldsmith; but, although facts were often strange to him, ideas were not.

"It's too comfortable," he said after a pause, "that's how it is. It's like a prison cell, all soapy and stuffy, this life of towns to-day. And people like it, and so they don't want to escape. That's what it is, to make beauty is to escape."

"Out from the prison of the actual," said Damaris, completing his thought, like an echo that caught a clumsy bellow to bring it back in sweetness, while he watched her face in half adoring fashion. For only with her had Ambrose ever known the delicate perception of a cultivated woman. "Yes," she continued, "it's true that we have main drains and water systems, but there are two things we haven't got; we have neither a gutter nor an empyrean, and to have great art you must have both, for it is from contrast that the visions of beauty come. In the very sting of his suffering and degradation a man sees a glory, beautiful as his dreams, rising like a fair white lily out of corruption. That's art; a way of escape, a widening horizon, an uplift. For art is freedom, the breadth of the far-off mountains seen from the smoke of hell sometimes, and not from a sanitary prison cell."

"But that means suffering," said Ambrose, with the fire of excitement crimsoning his face.

"Then one must suffer," said Damaris quietly. "Sometimes, perhaps when I have suffered, I shall try, too, to make a thing—in words."

A sudden sense of kinship leapt from one to the other, of loving service of the same ideal, the one tie on earth that has no regret coupled with it—a bond, indeed, that would not ill-fit the celestial hosts.

"You know," said Ambrose, after a silence full of the interchange of sympathy, "how I used to worry over the symbols in architecture. I know now there are no symbols, for 'tis all one great symbol. Like music, it's the symbol of a man's mind. Look," he said, speaking so hurriedly that the words tripped each other up, "in painting, however much you disguise it, you copy. So in sculpture. But when you build in sounds, or in stone, it's a new thing, yours, never seen anywhere till you saw it in yourself. It's the symbol of you, the music or the palace or the church."

"Or the dungeon," laughed Damaris. As they passed in the dusk into the shadow of the street, she put her hand for a moment, unperceived by him, on his arm. For here, she believed, was a man who would one day be of those who give some new human vision to their race. It was a fatal moment for Damaris, since a man's mental attraction would be the predominant force with her. She was no lyre for passion's fingers to play what tune the flame-winged god might choose, and for her to feel admiration for a man's spiritual qualities was to cross the Rubicon.

Ambrose left her at the Vicarage door, where she was told that a man was waiting to speak to her. Opening the door of the little waiting-room that was used for parish visitors, Damaris saw John Darracott rise.

"Wasn't it my father," she asked in surprise, "that you wanted to see?"

"Nay, ma'am, I thought a woman would help a woman best. That's why I've come to you. And if I've done wrong, you'll please to tell me. Only I've heard again and again that there's many and many a girl you've been good to."

"Tell me," said Damaris, laying aside her furs and sitting down by John. As she did so, she recognised him as the labourer about whom there had been all the gossip at the Quay.

"It isn't easy to say it," he said hesitatingly, "but I've come back to Hartland, when I ought to ha' left, because I couldn't abide to think of the cheeld not knowing where to turn to."

"Who is it you mean?" asked Damaris, who knew very well the difficulty the uneducated find in stripping a story of its unessentials.

But he was not listening to her at all, as she saw, in the absorption of his own thoughts.

"'Twas the very beginning of my trouble down to Quay," he said, never noticing that he was telling his own story too, "for I followed Thyrza Braund home that night, and there I seed her dancing like a woman bewitched to the sound of a fiddle."

"Whose?" asked Damaris sharply.

"Ambrose Velly was playing and she dancing. I had no thoughts for aught but that, and so I never was on watch that night, the night of the wreck."

"Darracott," said Damaris, pushing her chair back into the shadow, "are you in your senses? You cannot know what you're saying."

"Ay, I know. 'Tis the bare truth. I warned 'en of what it would lead to, and now 'tis come to what I said. The day his father died, he met her secret-like over to Bradworthy, where she's biding. I was in the field, and I saw her hold 'en same as a woman holds a man when she's his, his thing, to do what he will with."

Damaris got up and turned away. Was it true? It must surely be some mad dream from which she would soon awake. But nothing came save the man's heavy breathing, that irritated her beyond endurance.

Then the door opened, and a maid appeared with a lamp. The homely everyday came with her.

"Darracott," said Damaris, "I feel sure you're making a great mistake somewhere. Ambrose Velly is too honourable to make love to a girl like that."

"I seed 'em together in Bradworthy woods, and I say shame's threatening her. Else why don't he meet her open, and let all the world know?"

"You're a good friend to her," said Damaris, looking at the man curiously.

"Ay," he said slowly, "I'd bear a deal to see her happy. She's not made for rough work, Thyrza isn't. I love her dearly, and she's but a cheeld. And when you'm young like she is, there's naught to tell 'ee the way the sweetness ends. Ah, can't 'ee help? Go and see her, talk to her, as only a woman can. I'm taking a liberty to ask, but there's nobody else for me to go to. I thought of the woman she's staying with, but for aught I know I might be taking the roof off the maid's head by going to work that way."

Damaris could not refuse to believe in the girl's danger, or, at any rate, in Darracott's belief in it.

"She shall have all the help I can give," she said. "What I can do, I will. I will see her as soon as possible, though I feel like a spy on an honest man."

"He's only a lad,too," said Darracott, "with a lad's hot blood that's neither to hold nor to bind. 'Tis the woman only that can save herself, not all the angels in heaven can do it for her, for they don't know what a maid's tenderness is to a man's fire."

Damaris stood white and trembling while the new world of passion opened before her, as though through the solid flooring under her feet a panel had been opened to show the subterranean fires. For it was the first time she had faced in her own life that underworld, at which sheltered women glance askance, even many of those who play at the rescue of the submerged. For no mere brain knowledge of facts touches a woman's real nature; she knows nothing till she has proved it on her own heart-strings.

"I do not believe it," she said at last. "Ambrose Velly is a man of perfect honour, a man who thinks of nothing but his work. Yet, to remove this accusation from him, I will see the girl. It is work that I can do better than you."

"She's as dear to me as my heart's blood," said John, "but 'tis o'er-delicate work for a man's hand, the likes o' that."

For a moment the man himself interested Damaris, since the first sounds of her own agony were but hammering far off on the doors of her heart. Nevertheless, under all the brave cheer she made to herself, Damaris knew there was a substratum of truth in his story. Yet she rose to the challenge of the man's nobility, in the splendid assurance that to the goodness of goodwill nothing is impossible, for human power is stronger than all pain.

When the tiniest cog-wheel snaps in a power machine, no engineer is needed to predict that the whole will be thrown out of gear. Small wonder, then, that the machine called humanity should racket so lumberingly to its aim, when the minute cogs on which the great wheels turn are so constantly disorganised. The fact that one can say of the race, *and still it moves*, is proof enough of the miraculous foundation of our life. So the cog of Darracott's simple fidelity caught the great wheel of Damaris Westaway's idealism, and whirled it forward to heights it could never have gained alone.

"I will do all that can be done for the woman you love," she said quietly.

He knew that she meant it, but as he left the Vicarage he felt suddenly old and tired. As long as there was something he could do, the world was full of Thyrza's need. But now it was empty; for to Darracott, in all the wonders beneath the star-strewn sky, there were but two things—a wreck-strewn coast and a woman needing help. Even these were almost memories now. Yet in every memory there is contained a prophecy.

Left alone, Damaris sat screwing the heel of her shoe round and round on a piece of grit on the floor, while the day's events passed before her mind. Her own words came mockingly back to her—the gutter and the empyrean. She laughed as she recalled the glib eloquence of ignorance; for here were both exemplified, not in a Cellini of Renaissance Italy, but in a man of Devon of to-day. It was the picture suggested by Darracott's words, "as a woman holds a man when she's his," that came uppermost now. The values of life changed completely for Damaris in that vision of a mingled shame and glory that she had never known; for by such a woman, the world of passion is never realised till it comes like a strong man armed, an invading host.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BITTER CHALICE

ALTHOUGH Damaris Westaway had tried hard to free her mind of all injustice, yet the picture called up by Darracott's words perpetually recurred to her, as she faced Thyrza Braund across the tea-table of the inn sitting-room at Bradworthy. A momentary act, it was yet continually before her, increasing its cruel effect by its persistence and, like an instantaneous photograph of a leaping horse, vivid with poses never seen by the spectator's eye.

"Thyrza," she said at last, breaking the silence that had fallen between them, "I came over to-day really to see you, for there is something I must say to you."

"What can there be for you to say?" whispered Thyrza, her breath failing her. "I wondered why you came over like this, and so did Chrissie. Her very last words, as I came over here, were, 'There's something in the wind. What to goodness have 'ee been up to, cheeld?'"

"Chrissie is a wise woman," said Damaris, with a smile. "Do you remember, Thyrza, that morning when we met at Shipload Bay, after you'd been bathing?"

Thyrza nodded, her eyes wide open with fear of what was coming.

"Do you remember that we said there was a third kind of love that leads upwards, and the child of it is a great deed?"

"What is it?" cried Thyrza, "What have 'ee come to me about?"

"I think, perhaps, that it is you, Thyrza, who will be asked to do the great deed—to give up the man you love."

"What do 'ee mean? Speak plain, can't you?"

"You were seen in the woods with Ambrose Velly the other day."

"And what if I was? He's my lover! And what shame is there in that, I should like to know? He it was I meant at Shipload Bay."

"Ah, if I had only known!" said Damaris, with an irrepressible cry.

"And what difference would it ha' made if you had?" shrilled Thyrza. "But you want 'en yourself, that's what it is. You always have. I know you're up above me; but, it seems, not above him. You always liked 'en, I know that well enough!"

"You don't understand what I mean at all, Thyrza. He's going to rise by his talents into a world where you'd be strange, where you can't go with him. It doesn't matter at all what he is now, it's what he will be. He's going to live a quite different life from any you've been used to."

"Going to live with you, you mean," said Thyrza bitterly.

"I've no such thoughts at all, as you know."

"I don't know anything of the kind. You've always had a hankering after Ambrose, else why has he been taken up same as you have?"

"Because my father thinks he is worth helping, that he has great powers."

"I dunno anything about that. I want to know why I shall do 'en any harm. He's only a step above me, for my mother was his mother's cousin. Now his father's dead he'll marry me, and take me to live with 'en wherever he goes. 'Twas only that he couldn't take me to the farm that's prevented him marrying me before."

"Has he told his mother of this?" asked Damaris slowly. "Has she been to see you, or sent a message?"

There was a silence again, and the rising gusts of wind sounded in the ears of both. To Damaris it seemed like the roaring of the sea of reality, into which she was slowly plunging like a timid swimmer, while Thyrza stood with bent head resting on her clasped hands. To her mind Mr. Velly's death had altered all the future, for now Ambrose would be able to take her away as soon as he knew the necessity for it. Yet here she was confronted with the social laws of suitability of mind and character, for which nothing in her past experience had trained her.

"Child," began Damaris.

"My Lord! don't you 'child' me," sobbed Thyrza. "You're taking him away from me! Why do 'ee treat me so cruel?"

"Come here, Thyrza," said Damaris, pulling the girl nearer by the dimpled wrist. "It must be a pain to you, I know; but if you love him you will try to understand what I say."

"But if I love 'en, how can I hurt 'en?"

The words pierced Damaris Westaway's shield of complacency, and suddenly the vision of the gardener's daughter who became Catherine Blake rose before her eyes. She thought of the noble, ignorant woman, barely able to write, who never complained of poverty, and was a true helpmate to a genius. Then she recognised that Thyrza was no Catherine Blake, nor was Ambrose, indeed, a dreamer of vast dreams, to whom a garret-room would be the vestibule of heaven. The social success, in which his wife must help, would be absolutely necessary for his career.

"See, Thyrza," she said, "if he marries you, he will have to work just to get you a home. He will be poor and struggling for a long time and, even if he gets on, you won't be able to lead the life he must lead. His brains will make people forget how he has risen, but you won't even have the manners of the world in which he will live."

"You mean I'd demean him?" said Thyrza, in a very small voice.

"I mean you'd be happier where you are. It would all be so strange, Thyrza, to you, that you would be miserable. And if he didn't marry you, but went on caring for you?"

"Well," said Thyrza, "I'd have 'en anyway."

"Then," said Damaris, in still lower tones, "you would be a shame to him, just a shame. And you'd be an outcast in your own eyes, even if no one else knew. Oh, I know men often have such shames in their lives. But don't you love him well enough to pray that there may be no dark blot, caused by you, in the life of the man you say you love? Give him up, for his sake, if not for your own."

"My heavens!" said Thyrza, looking up for the first time; "why, you love him yourself!"

The thin pocket-pencil with which Damaris had been playing snapped in her hand, and she turned away up the room, towards the cool air from the window. At that moment came the first doubt of her own purposes; she could not tell for what she was fighting, whether for Ambrose's career, or for her own heart's desire. The next moment she knew.

Thyrza came up to her, and scarcely reaching the taller woman's shoulder, caught the sleeve that was half-turned away from her.

"And his child's on its way," she said quietly—"his child and mine."

"Oh, my God."

In a paroxysm that shook her from head to foot, Damaris turned, and stripping off the lamp-shade placed it on the table. She looked in Thyrza's eyes and saw the truth, looked into her own heart and knew with a certainty beyond contradiction that she had been just a woman fighting for her own hand. Face to face with herself, at last she swam into the sea of reality, caught in the eddy of fact.

The next moment a storm of love and jealousy attacked her, and she seized Thyrza, sweeping her into her arms, pressing her close, raining kisses on the mouth that had won all she herself must starve for.

"Ay," said Thyrza to herself, "you'm hungry, poor dear soul," and held the agonised woman close, calling her tender names. For in that moment of reality the two had suddenly changed places, and the weakling had the stronger mind.

"That's the way he loved me, only tenderer," thought Thyrza to herself, till, though unsaid, the idea seemed to reach Damaris and she pushed the girl away.

"I prayed," said Thyrza, "that whatever punishment there was should come on me. It's come now; for after what you've said, I must leave 'en free. I'll stand between him and nothing that's good."

Her eyes had dark shadows under them now, like bruises on a flower-head.

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Damaris, her voice sounding in her own ears as if it came from a far distance.

"Give him up. Go away where he can't find me."

"Is it true what you told me—absolutely, certainly true?" asked Damaris with sudden suspicion.

"As true as that we'm standing here."

"Then how can you do it, Thyrza? His child to have poverty, namelessness?"

"But it'll be his child anyway. That'll be enough for it."

"You're beside yourself. You don't know what you're saying."

"Oh, I don't, I don't," sobbed Thyrza, suddenly breaking down. "However shall I bear it?"

"Does he know?" asked Damaris, trying to regain her own self-control.

"No; I lied to 'en when he asked. 'Twas before his father died, when he'd a heap of trouble and misery to bear. I wouldn't add to it. Now, if you hadn't come, I should ha' told 'en, for he'll be freer. But what you've said alters everything. He'll be a great man, mayhap, if I don't hinder 'en."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said Damaris; "I didn't know how it was when I spoke. This, that you've told me, alters everything. Forgive me, for I didn't know what mischief I was doing. I was a girl ignorant of everything, blundering in where I ought to have been afraid to meddle. Sit down again, Thyrza, and let us think what can be done. Forget what I said."

As Damaris sat holding the girl's hand she marvelled at her own vulgarity. For now that she was actually in contact with the "gutters and empyreans" of which she had talked so glibly, even in the very gutter itself gleamed the love that will bear hard usage and calumny rather than injure.

But was it right to allow the sacrifice? To offer up Thyrza and her child to an entirely problematic future, to a promise that might see no fulfillment, based as it was, solely on enthusiasm and hope? Again, might Ambrose not be the stronger for the handicap? And, deeper still, ought he not to pay? Why, in the name of justice, should this girl pay for two?

Damaris could not answer any of these.questions.

Three hours later she softly opened the door of the

Vicarage, to which she had returned shortly before, and, closing it behind her, walked down the main street of Hartland.

Before morning she had walked miles, for during those hours the powers of her own nature were rising in her like some poison that waits, lurking in the system till it declares itself by the agony it produces.

The house was a prison, the sleepers in Hartland an offence; for under these roofs what vileness and deception were concealed. Yet never had the beauty of a spring night struck so vividly on her senses as now, when the waves of meadow scent filled her nostrils, and the cry of a lamb sounded above the murmur of a stream in the valley where the Abbey stands.

Presently out of the grey light there emerged the square tower of Hartland church, a sombre rock with its base in misty shadows, backed by the spaces of sea and sky, a landmark for miles round.

A monument of human folly, it seemed to her, this Church, whether, as here, set up in the wilderness, or in the midst of reeking alleys. The deadliest blow of all had been struck through it at the whole human race, so her father had often told her. For had not that Church shut, during many centuries, the tenderest hearts in monasteries and convents, driving to the stake, or into exile, the boldest thinkers, and leaving only the brutal or the dull to make the ages yet to be by the children they bore?

She passed by the sleeping cottages of Stoke, up to the six gnarled lime trees that form a miniature avenue to the church, and sitting down on the stone stile that leads to the churchyard, she began to realise that she held in her hands, at the present moment, the fate of several human beings.

Suddenly she covered her face with her hands, crouching down on the wide steps of the stile, as the women in city archways do; for there seemed to come leaping towards her with the clearness of a vision, a child form, rosy with sweet blood, dimpled and soft.

Then she understood Thyrza; there was now to Damaris no question of forgiveness, for Thyrza and her like were the women of nature, the women of barbarism. What are social laws to them when the great forces of life call loudly?

Damaris drew a deep breath and rose from her crouching attitude, for she wanted to face this new perception, terrible as it was at first to her own fierce maidenliness. She walked upright now, with swinging steps, towards the sea, with something of the elation that the mind feels at the first sight of a great idea, just caught in its bare outlines through the shifting mist of fancies. Damaris, for a second, felt herself full of fresh light for she had grasped the meaning of an old worship, older than Christianity, older than Judaism, the worship of the mother-soul that goes back to far Egyptian days. Then she laughed at her own pedantry.

But the next instant pity smote her, for though man himself is only just emerging from barbarism, yet the social organisation would cripple poor Thyrza's life. They pay back with deadly power, these laws that women break so lightly. They would pay, the woman and child. For the innocent must pay most dearly after all. Now Damaris thoroughly understood her father's passionate desire to help the spoilt lives that crowd our cities, the human wreckage everywhere. Was Ambrose's child to go down there among the outcast, to live on the crumbs that fall from the tables of plenty?

Ambrose's child? Then the agony struck home, such agony as she had never even guessed at.

She sat on a rock, watching the foam fall like snow-mist outside the inky shadows of the cliffs.

At last the long rays of the dawn began to gleam over the heaving surface of greyness, and in the lines of light there seemed to reach worn senses the shining of the great peace that comes with renunciation. For Damaris had found her true self, the self that gives up its heart's desire at the call of another's need. The dawn seemed like the coming of the Son of Man to the spirits in prison; she drew long, slow breaths that shook her whole body. It was thus that she greeted the angel of the infinite that comforts in the hour of unselfish rejection.

On the following evening Mr. Westaway stood up to preach for the last time in Hartland Church. As the old sexton went round lowering the lights one by one, the Vicar watched the faces of his parishioners grow dimmer and more dim, till nothing but white discs remained. He saw Ambrose Velly seated by his mother all-beshrouded in crape; not far from them sat Damaris, her face upturned towards her father in the tenseness of sympathy; far away at the back of the church he noticed John Darracott. Then the last light was turned down; only against the rich carving of the painted screen behind him, against its palms of gold and red, the Vicar's white head shone out in the light of the two candles that burned on the edge of the pulpit.

Mr. Westaway possessed the power, often found in shy people, of speaking his most intimate thoughts to a crowd as he could never have done to a friend. He gave out his text automatically: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Then, with a sudden impulse, he pushed aside the manuscript from which he had intended to read his farewell sermon and plunged into the speech he had not prepared. Leaning over the pulpit he looked into the dim church, beyond which he could see the swallows wheeling outside as he gazed through the open doorway.

"We men," said he, "make many laws. But in God's world, the world in which we all live, there is but one law. You have just heard it: 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' It is the law that every Church, east and west alike, has taught; it is the law that is written all down the history of the ages, to the very last minute of recorded time, which is—now. There is no other law.

"Yet you, wise farmers as many of you are, men who never sow barley expecting wheat to come, or clover if you want oats, you go on sowing strife and expecting the harvest of peace, sowing lust and expecting the harvest of purity, sowing penury and expecting plenty. Yet you know the folly, and so you try to-day to undo what you did yesterday. You often pray, though you may not know it, that God will turn back His universe and blot out yesterday; make it as though it had never been. For in nothing that we do are we more impious than in our prayers.

"Yet there is no God in this, or any other universe, that will do this—or can. For it is you yourselves who are your own god, and what you do to-day is settling what your lot will be to-morrow, and in the many, many to-morrows that you cannot see. And this is as true of nations and peoples as it is of individuals; the England of to-morrow will be the England that is being manufactured to-day—by us. For there is no secret in all the world. Things done in the field shall be known in the street, and things in the bedroom on the very housetop. There are women here who try to cover their man's brutality; it can't be done. There are men here who try to hide their wife's meanness; it can't be done For the beating of a child, for the lust of rage, or the torture of a wife, for the lust of the flesh, will bear fruit one day, not in the cowering child, or in the worn-out woman alone, but in the man himself. He pays, if not now, then in the future, and with compound interest; for the book-keepers of eternity never make a mistake. And the stingy woman who feeds her servants on cheese parings, if there are any who will stand such treatment in these days, starves her own life more effectually than she ever starved any kitchen wench's. And a man who betrays a woman, even though he hide the deed and its fruit, pays in some other lot for the crime that he thought none knew save one poor soul. Speak out you must, sometime, and in the very meagreness of our lives to-day our past speaks eloquently enough.

"My past speaks now to me more clearly than if blazoned by the trumpet of an angel. For I have given meanly, thought only selfish thoughts, failed through cowardice to speak what I believed—and I reap the harvest to-day.

"For, like many of you, I am starving. In a world full of glory, full of love, of deep enthusiasms, of blows for the good and battles for the right, of the glow of comrade valour, I have been satisfied with—what?

"A tepid respect from my parishioners, a more or less conventional feeling of sympathy from a mere handful of friends, good meals occurring frequently, and a little purposeless thought. Just the things, in fact, that satisfy most of you. Why, the most amazing thing in this world is not the poverty, nor the suffering, nor the pain, nor the sin, but that a creature thrilling from head to foot with capacities for bliss—yes, sheer bliss, you know the word, bliss, the thing that seizes you on eagle's wings and bears you to the heights—should be satisfied with soft beds, beef on Sunday, a lukewarm smile, or a sour one, from his neighbour, and a yawn from his wife. 'Twasn't that way that she greeted you when all the wonder of life was in the touch of her hands, in the glance of her eyes.

"My friends, it doth not appear yet what we shall be, for worlds of power are already opening before us, if we will only enter them. But we must not be content with fifthrate satisfactions. And without courage, without the boldness that speaks what is in us, and faces the consequences of our own deeds, we can never be men, much less the gods we were meant to be.

"This is my last word to you. I shall never speak from this pulpit again. But I hope, when I've left it, to speak more clearly than I have ever done in my life before.

"And now for my reasons for leaving it. I heard a man say the other day: 'Passon's leaving because he thinks he's too good for the Church.' Now, I'm leaving for precisely the opposite reason. This Church follows a Man who lived the life of toil, who had often no roof over His head and but little food to eat, and I have all my life denied Him by taking all the ease, all the money, all the food, all the treasures on which I could lay hands. My friends, I am not good enough for the Church of the Jewish carpenter, the friend of harlots and fishermen and outcasts, the close companion of the rejected of men."

He was gone from the pulpit by the time the lights were all turned up, and he remained sitting quietly in his place while the curate finished the service. In the bustle that followed the sermon, all eyes were turned from Mr. Westaway to Damaris. Yet her thoughts were hardly with her father at all, but with Thyrza, for the thought grew with every hour that passed, that the girl, for all her quietness, was approaching a state of desperation. The sermon brought this idea to a head, till Damaris felt almost panic-stricken at seeing Ambrose sitting peacefully there, while the consequences of his acts were perhaps writing themselves down for all men to see.

As she saw him stoop and whisper something to his mother, she stood up in irrepressible excitement. Then, when he slipped out before the rest of the congregation had moved, she followed noiselessly down the aisle after him.

Once outside, she recognised the folly of her half-thought, for she saw that he merely took the road to Long Furlong, probably hurrying back that he might relieve Vinnicombe from some task. It was impossible that he could have applied the sermon to the thought of Thyrza's need, as she had done.

In her perplexity Damaris stood twisting her hands and asking breathlessly for help. For she was afraid of her own responsibility, since she alone knew of Thyrza's trouble. At last she ran down the lane after Ambrose, counting feverishly the gate spaces that yawned on the open meadows in the dim light. Then, as she noticed the signs of emotion on his face, her own courage came back. They walked on together, the sound of their footsteps sending little tremors through her brain.

"I have a message for you," said she, "though I did not know till to-night that I had it. It's from Thyrza Braund. I was at Bradworthy yesterday and saw her."

With one great heart-beat Ambrose knew what was coming.

"John Darracott asked me to go," she added.

"And you believed all that he told you," said Ambrose hoarsely.

"He did not tell me all, for he did not know it himself. But now I know everything, more even than you."

"That cannot possibly be," he laughed savagely.

"Never mind that," she cried impatiently. "The point is that Thyrza cannot be left alone. You must go to her to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes; to-night. You ought to have gone this morning. It's my fault that you didn't. But hour by hour I've seen more clearly."

"But you must tell me more than this."

"Think of the worst that could have happened—and then go. Ah, you will regret it to the end of your days if you don't."

"What must you think of me?" he cried, standing still.

"I try to think no evil. I try to understand," she answered brokenly.

Then, as he saw her face, a gleam of comprehension came to his masculine denseness.

"God forgive me," he said at last, "for all the trouble I've brought on you."

"Most of all on her," she said pitifully; "but you will go?"

"At once," he said. Then with a "God bless you, Princess," he ran back to Hartland to meet his mother, and hire a horse at the inn.

So far, most of Ambrose Velly's troubles had been brought on him by other people, but now he faced the worst misery in the world, the pain brought on him by his own act. He scarcely dared think of what lay behind Damaris Westaway's words. Yet he guessed, and knew that Thyrza must have lied to spare him trouble. In the quick thrust of this thought he winced, for he would not willingly have hurt a living thing, yet had brought this on a woman. Thus he looked on the face of his desire and found it ugly.

As he rode through the dark to Bradworthy, he was fighting for a foothold, up or down, in the great inclined plane of existence, and when he thundered at the door of Chrissie's darkened house, the recording angel registered ascent, for the sunny, artist nature had savoured, at least once, the ugliness of basely gratified instincts.

At last Mrs. Rosevear put her head out of the window, and seeing who stood below, hurried down in weird nocturnal array to open the door. They stood together by the table in the light of a candle that guttered in the draught from the door.

"Ay," she said bitterly, "so you can come now when it's too late. She's gone; for it's Thyrza that you want, of course."

"Gone?" he repeated dully.

"Yes; gone out of this house, so she shouldn't shame it. I charged her with it, and she told me last night."

"But why did she go?"

"She's paying for the both of you now, and the world'll soon know," said Chrissie slowly.

Ambrose turned away.

"Chrissie, I swear to you I never knew it. I'd have cut my right hand off before she should have suffered like this."

"Ay, very like," said Chrissie miserably; "and God forgive me, for I spoke sharp to her too, the poor little soul. I never thought of her giving me the slip like this, or I'd have watched her night and day."

The woman's eyes were swollen with crying, as he noticed now.

"Chrissie," he said, "you're a good sort. But what are we to do now? She must be brought back. You'll take her in, won't you?"

"My word, 'take her in,'" saith he; "why, don't I wish I'd got her here this minute! I'd tuck her up safe and warm, I'll warn. She never told me who the man was, but I knowed when I saw your face."

Ambrose groaned inwardly; in the drumming of his pulses he seemed to hear the flails of fate winnowing the grain from the chaff on the dusty threshing-floor of the world. But which is grain and which is chaff none but the unseen threshers know, when such loyalty is found in a frail woman.

"Which way did she go?" he demanded.

"I can't say," said Chrissie, with a gesture of despair.

"But didn't you send along the roads after her?"

"And give warning to all the world of her trouble! Yah! you're naught but a fool," exclaimed Chrissie, her temper giving way at last. "No, I dunno where she is. At the bottom of the nearest pond, mayhap. And you can't find her to-night. Nobody can. That's your punishment, to think of her wandering, God knows where."

"You really don't know?"

"I know no more than the dead. Now get out of my house, for, though I'd be thankful to see her little white face again, I can't stomach the sight of 'ee nohow. 'Tis all the man's fault when there's a rig like this," cried Chrissie, deserting all her principles of man management in an outburst of sex loyalty. "But I've been a fool, too, letting the cheeld traipse about free—me, me, that ought to have known better than let her. For there's some so queachy and prim that you'd think all the babbies grew upon parsley-beds, and all the slaughtering was done with a butter-knife. Mim's not the word for that sort. To look at them mincing along, you'd think they didn't know milk come from a cow nor eggs from a hen. Lord, I know that sort. 'Oh, really,' says they, if you let fly something powerful. But I'm not that sort, thank God, yet here I've been acting like one. Never again will I be blinded like this, though."

Over in his room at the inn Ambrose walked up and down all night with a maddening repetition of fancies about Thyrza going on in his brain. He would not look at the darker pictures painted by Chrissie's hysteria, but he knew they were there. When the first light came he was asleep with his head on his arms, lying across the bed in a restless slumber full of aches. He started up at last to thank God for the return of daylight, when he could at least move in the search for Thyrza.

On the Sunday afternoon, while Chrissie was at church, the girl had slipped out of the house into a dense storm of rain that was falling at the moment. At the end of the village she stood under the hedge for a moment, till hearing a trap approaching, she hurried out into the middle of the road.

"Whoa, there," said the driver, pulling up when he saw that the girl wanted to speak to him. She began a story of a lost road, and the urgent need there was for her to push on to her destination.

"Bideford," said the man, pushing his hat back from his forehead. "Bideford's a brave way from here. I'm only going back to Galsworthy farm. That's so fur as I go."

"Whatever shall I do?" asked Thyrza.

"You'd better bide here to-night."

"Oh, but I must get on. My husband's ill, and I can't lose any time. Can't you help me?"

"Tell 'ee what, you seem a respectable young woman and in a rare taking. I've got to be in Buckland Brewer early to-morra, and I could set 'ee down there at the carrier's. You can get a shake-down with Mrs. Leggo to Galsworthy, I make no manner of doubt."

After a long, slow drive the trap drew up in front of a low house, its ancient walls stone-fronted in grey and sheltered by a chestnut tree that leant above a wood-rick, piled with mossy branches and feathered with boughs cut from the gorse. The iron-grey walls were meagre, not with the squalor of poverty, but with its age-long struggle. Yet on summer noons, between the sheltering trees of the meadow in front, all the far distance shimmered for miles below in the haze of sunlight, and from the field at the back, to west and east, lay the purple of Dartmoor and Exmoor, till both were lost in the sky-line.

As Thyrza walked up the garden path she could see a grey-haired woman bending over the seam of a nightdress. The room was bright with the china that glittered on the dresser in the fire-light, and in the meek, simple glance of the lanthorn-jawed woman who answered her knock, Thyrza found comfort. For the tightly braided hair, the squeezed black bodice, even the cotton-wool in the ears, might have comforted a starveling cur. The woman glanced from Thyrza to the trap in the yard.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I'm on my way to meet my husband. Your man found me at Bradworthy and offered me a lift, so that I could go on to-morrow."

"He's no man of mine. He works for Squire Polkinghorne. But 'tis a queer tale; for there's inns at Bradworthy where you could ha' been put up."

"But I've never been to places like that by myself."

Mrs. Leggo fully understood that sentiment.

"I'm not a tramp woman," protested Thyrza, "and I can pay."

"I don't want any pay. What's your husband?"

"He's a sailor. I'm to meet him at Bideford."

"Mine was a sailor, too. But he died twelve months agone, and then Squire Polkinghorne, for that's who Galsworthy belongs to, put me in here 'gainst 'tis let again. 'Twas built for the Galsworthy family, I suppose, but they must ha' left years upon years agone. 'Tis eight hundred years old in some parts of the old walls, they say. I've only the use of two rooms, and I've a young baby, too, as well as two chillern."

"Oh," cried Thyrza, "do let me come in and see the baby. I love a baby, and I've nowhere else to go."

"By good rights you should never ha' come at all. But that's just Tom Sanguin's way. Never does he come home but what he picks up something on the way, if 'tis only a flea, so his wife says. But you can't go to his cottage, for 'tis a little small sort of place, and with ten children, too. I suppose you must come in, for 'tisn't a night to turn a dog out."

By the side of the hearth was a cradle, and on the pillow a sleeping head. Thyrza sank down by the side of it and began to cry.

"There, there, you'm tired out," said the woman. "I know, only don't 'ee drop a tear on 'en, there's a dear, for 'tis mortal unlucky. Now, have 'ee got anything dry to put on?"

"May I go up and tidy? I'm such a lerrups as never was."

If Thyrza had been "as deep as Garrick," as Mrs. Velly would have said, she could have uttered nothing more likely to please Mrs. Leggo than that, and when the guest came down, clean and dry, all doubts about strange women who stole spoons and cut throats had vanished. On a plate in front of the fire was a hissing rasher of bacon, and on the hob stood a teapot.

"There, now, sit ye down and take your supper comfortable," said her hostess. "I declare I'm quite set up to see 'ee; for I don't so much as pass the time of day with a stranger, not once in a month. And though I've been used to a quiet life, for my husband was in the coastguard, there's naught could be quieter than Galsworthy between the four seas, as they say."

"But how do you come to be here?" asked Thyrza.

"I married from the squire's, ten years agone, and when Zack, that's my man, died, they put me here for a bit, after the cheeld come."

"Oh, he's waking," cried Thyrza, as a sleepy cry and a heaving of blankets came from the cradle.

"There's a treasure," said his mother, holding him up, blanket and all, while the beady eyes of the little one blinked at the "canna moon" on the table.

"Ah! give him to me," cried Thyrza, holding out her arms.

The warmth of the bundle against her, the restless limbs, awoke the pain in her, as the first spring day arouses a torpid animal.

"There now, how good he is," said Mrs. Leggo. "'Tis easy to see you'll be a good mother. Now, I'll tell 'ee about Zack, for you've got a heart to 'ee, though it did seem queer for 'ee to turn up upon a body's doorstep like this. A better nor a kinder man than Zack never broke England's bread," she continued, "though a Primitive Methodist, which I don't hold with myself. And never so much as winked an eye at the maidens after us had stood afore the parson. And the beer he'd drink in a twelvemonth wouldn't ha' hurt a two-year-old."

"Ah, he must ha' been a good man," sighed Thyrza, thinking of another who had winked his eyes at the maidens.

But Mrs. Leggo's inward eyes were fixed on the lonely cottage above Gurnet's Head, her ears were filled with the churning of the surf.

"It was over by the Land's End they sent 'en to, last of all, the wishtest place that ever God made. There was but the three cottages, and one empty at that, and as for the fam'ly that lived in the second—well, there's fam'lies in the coastguard that you couldn't be friends with for five minutes. And three miles to go for as much as a loaf, and that over seven stiles. The meeting-place, where one coastguard meets the next man every day, was one of they camps that the old ancient ones made back along."

It was a prehistoric coast castle, wind-swept, Atlantic buffeted, and ghostly with the skin-clad hillmen. Thyrza shivered as the grey mist of night closed all round the farm.

"And us come from Boscastle, where a body could find a sawl to speak to, and get for a bit sometimes out of the sound of the roar." She meant the beating of the surf, endless as the centuries, relentless as the nature forces behind it.

"'Twas a punishment place to 'en, that's what it was. There was two above Zack as sent the orders to my man, and the boat that didn't put out, but that ought to ha' done so, could ha' saved five lives, and one of 'em a cheeld's. So they sent my man to Gurnet's Head, and I knowed that he couldn't get they lives out of his head, for they could ha' bin so easy saved, and him so tender to his own chillern. Why, the last thing that ever he did was to undress the little maid.

"And then the pains in his head come on. They called it the influenzy, but I knowed better. Soon after he went to Lightship, and his mates said a wouldn't touch not a drop of beer or tay, but sat holding his head. When he comed back I knowed a was worse, though a wouldn't be put on the sick-list. And all the time the churn, churn of the say in his ears. Why, I've known 'en start up of a night all in a sweat with the skritch of the gulls, and when a man's come to that——You see, there wasn't naught to look forward to, but the meeting and the six hours' shift of watching, with pay-day on the first of the month, though if the first come on a Sunday, you don't get your pay till the Monday.

"One night I missed 'en. The gulls was a-calling, and the say like lead. He'd just put the eldest cheeld to bed, and I did what I'd never done afore—just laid down by the side of her for a minute. 'Twas all quiet-like, till I sort of missed 'en, and the goose-flesh shiver come upon me. I went down to the passage, and there was his coat and hat. 'Twas November, so I knowed a hadn't gone to meeting. I went out and called, and then I thought a must be up to fowl-house, and I started across garden to it. Zack had been digging up the patch, and the girt ridges he'd left seemed to start up and hit me. But I never got to fowl-house, for there come a sudden puff of mist—ouff! like that—and I couldn't ha' opened that door. I reckon 'twas then a did it. And that mist was his spirit come out to warn me, for 'twould ha' bin the death o' me and o' this one."

Pink Toes gurgled gleefully as the firelight crept closer into the flaxen tangle of curls, through which shone the red flush of his little round head.

"'Mr. Marsden, Mr. Marsden!' I called to the man next door. 'Where's Zack?'

"'Why, gone to make a meeting, Mrs. Leggo. What be all in a stour about?' saith a.

"'Zack's never gone to meeting,' says I. 'You go up to fowl-house.'

"With that I went and fetched the chillern down. I don't know why, for I took no more notice of 'em than of the flags on the floor. And then the tears come, and that saved me. Mrs. Marsden was by me now. I'd had words with her the day before, but that didn't matter now; 'twas agony point. And her looked out. I couldn't. Suddenly her said, 'Jim's to the telephone.'

"And then I knowed I shouldn't see Zack again. And presently her said—and all the time the churn, churn, coming in through the window: 'There's Mr. Tregelles.' That's the farmer to Lower Town, I thought, silly-like. Then her slipped out. I would ha' followed her, but they pushed me back. There was five men outside by now, and ne'er a one of 'em could come in to tell me the truth. I've often laughed since to think of they five; gabies though they be, they're tender-hearted, they men.

"At last Mrs. Marsden come in, and I says, sharplike—

"'Well, what is it?'

"And her says, 'You'll never forgive me if I tell 'ee."

"'Shall I ever see 'en again?'

"'No, never,' says she, quite quiet.

"And I never did, not even in his coffin, though the coroner had left the knife upon the table when I come into the 'quest room. I just told 'en, too, what I thought of 'en, girt cabbage-head, for leaving it about. And they took the coffin over seven stiles, but I couldn't ha' borne the cheeld away from the churn of they waves, though I pray I may never hear it again now he's come."

And Pink Toes, born within the sound of the surges, tucked finger and thumb into his mouth and slept in the firelight. And Zack slept, too, with never the call of a seagull to break his rest.

Thyrza was crying softly.

"There now," said Mrs. Leggo, "'tis turned 'ee up. I didn't ought to ha' told 'ee. Isn't your man good to 'ee, my dear, or is it a little one that's gone?"

"We've had a quarrel, and I fear I've lost 'en," said Thyrza. "He doesn't care for me any more."

"Is it another woman, my dear?"

Thyrza gave no answer, and Mrs. Leggo continued—

"That's bitterer than death, they do say. But I dunno that 'tis so, for you can win 'en back. But for me, when I wake in the night, there's naught but pillows and the thoughts of what has been. If I'm ill, there's nobody to say, 'Shall I make a cup of tea, my dear?' Ay, 'tis bitter to ha' quarrelled, but there, your man's somewhere, after all, if 'tis only to hold on to, when t'other woman isn't by. 'Tis always something if you can feel a man near 'ee, if 'tis only that you can scratch 'en. He's no shadow, and 'tis lonely with never a word, nor a blow, nor a sign."

"But I've lost him all the same."

"For a bit, maybe. But just you bide awhile, and he'll swing round and want 'ee same as ever. A man's like a clock weight—left, right, he goes to, first one and then another—but every swing he's straight once, and that's where the wife can catch 'en. But there, 'tis time you was between the sheets, for Tom'll start early."

Thyrza awoke suddenly in the night and lay for a moment with a wildly beating heart, for from the cradle by the bed came a child's cry. In a moment she was standing with the little one in her arms, in the ray of moonlight that filtered under the half-drawn blind. Mrs. Leggo's snore came steadily from the old four-poster, as the baby hands, the clinging mouth, the soft thud of little feet, fell on Thyrza's body. Her child would be fatherless like this one—nay, nameless and helpless, but for her. Bending herself over the child's body, like an aged woman, in the yearning of her loneliness. Thyrza carried the baby to its mother. For a long while she lay listening to the sound of its comforting, with throbs of pain shaking her own body from head to foot. Mrs. Leggo knew, for suddenly flinging an arm round the tortured woman, she said—

"There, there, go back to 'en, my dear, and never mind the other woman, for he's more than just a man to 'ee. I can see that. He's arms full against arms empty, and that's life and death to a woman like you."

Before full daylight Galsworthy was far behind Thyrza, and by the afternoon she had reached Northam, from which it was understood that she would push on to Bideford. Wandering into that famous churchyard corner at Northam which faces the bay, she stood watching the sea that had somehow been calling her all day.

Eastward, Baggy faded in foam of spindrift; westward, Hartland towered in purple. Between them the grey shore echoed with the surges that break against the barrier of pebbles and curl in lines of foam across the sandy bar that shifts at Torridge mouth. To stand overlooking Bideford Bay is to hear the thunder-roll of eternity, incessant, yet non-insistent, grey with the greyness of infinitude, sombre with the patience of the ages, yet restful to the fret of breathing life. Miles inland the organ note of that great volume of sea-sound is distinctly audible; at sea it moans with the menace of an unseen force.

Over Thyrza's head the branches were green with young leaves, round her were gravestones with mossy lines. In these simple things quick thought came to birth within her: a sense of the birth and death of other lives, of pain often bravely borne, of the manifold burgeoning and fading of the tree of human life.

Far from tears now, she walked out to the flagstaff which rises from a heap of sixty boulders, each marked with a name from the muster roll of great sailors, guardians of the waters that beat upon the foreshore. Drake, Nelson, Raleigh, Carew: even Thyrza had heard such names; something, too, she knew of the men of Bideford in Devon, who in the whistle of the shot and the roar of the waves had obeyed the call of a need larger than the desires of their own lives.

Below the steps an old man was breaking stones, at one and sixpence a yard of broken stuff, which must be three feet high—breaking stones and leaning a broken thigh that refused to remain in its socket on an old sack. Whistling he was, too, between whiles, on the bit of bread he earned.

Thyrza understood the clarion call of honour that sounded for the men of the sea; she understood, too, the long patience of steady toil. Slowly to her the dawn was coming in the sense of other lives, in the knowledge that no man liveth to himself—or dieth. The words came with a shock that revealed the thought that had been at the back of her mind all the hours since she had fled. With distinct knowledge there came, too, a revulsion from the idea. She must live and not die; for the life within her was a call as clear as any clarion note of patriotism or of toil. She must seek a place to rest in, first, for the long ache of weariness racked all her limbs.

Then she turned and saw Ambrose coming towards her, with the light from the sea shining full on the old, young face that his night's vigil had given him. They stood gazing silently at each other for a moment, till he held out his arms, and with a stumbling run she flew to him and was caught and held.

"My God!" he whispered, "why didn't you trust me? Do you think I haven't suffered, too, since I knew?"

"You know, Ambrose?"

"Everything, my true little wife. And soon to be a little wife with a real wedding ring on her finger."

"I've spoilt your life anyway. And she cares—for you, too."

He was silent, till at last he shook off his absorption in feigned gaiety.

"And now, Thyrza, a square meal, a drive home to Bradworthy, and then—Chrissie."

Thyrza dreaded the latter item more than tongue could tell; but she knew her fears were groundless, once she was across the Rosevears' threshold and in sight of her hostess's face.

"Come upstairs this minute," cried Chrissie, looking at the girl's white face; "the kettle's boiling, and I've got a hot jar ready for 'ee and some broth I can warm in two seconds. And," she said drily, as she turned to Ambrose in the doorway, "I reckon *that's* your way."

That was apparently across the green. At any rate, it was the direction Ambrose took, none saying him nay.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

"THERE'S some," said Chrissie Rosevear, "that wouldn't skip if there was an earthquake about, and there's others that worrit if the kettle's likely to boil over in an hour's time. I dunno which sort's the most wearing, but I reckon both go to a boiling or they wouldn't be here."

Outside thin threads of smoke from the chimneys of Bradworthy were staining the clear purity of the summer sky. Through the open doorway of the Rosevears' kitchen, where Thyrza and Chrissie sat sewing, came faint whiffs of sweetbriar, as the cows crossed the green for the afternoon milking, their udders swaying in time to the rhythm of their pace.

Chrissie had just caught sight of Damaris Westaway driving up to the door of the inn, and she deduced from that fact the conclusion that she had come on an errand connected with Thyrza's marriage, which was to take place in a fortnight's time. For Chrissie was a mistress of the gift commonly called by the learned *ex pede Herculem*, and she could assess a woman's income by her petticoat frill, and unlock the door to her desires by the feather in her hat. It is a social gift confined to no class, but common to femininity itself. For the most stupid woman alive is capable of blessing or banning her neighbour on the evidence of a doorstep or a lamp globe.

"Now," continued Chrissie, "if there's anything that wants doing, Miss Westaway is the one to do it. If her thought you'd break your leg to-morrow at two sharp, her'd be there at half-past one, against it happened."

"A finger in every pie, that's what you mean," said Thyrza, whose mood was one of resentment towards Damaris for the part she had played in her story.

"Some pies are the better for a finger in them," snapped Chrissie, "though they scorch a body's fingers, too. I always lend a hand when I'm asked; but Miss Westaway'll walk miles to see if aught can be done. For her won't rest till every babby's tubbed constant, and every bad leg's tended like your grandmother's. But for all her, there will be bad legs in damp cottages, and children with the thrush, if they'm fed dirty. And sluts'll be with us till the judgment day."

"But getting a bit sharpish, is Miss Damaris, by what I hear," said Thyrza; "they say she won't let any old grumble-guts have his say out now, but catches 'en up quick with: 'There, now, there's hundreds in a worse way than you.' And allows no rory-tory feathers or fallals, same as she used to laugh at in the maidens."

"A maid gets like that with no Mr. Right coming along," said Chrissie judicially, "and she with frills to her petticoats six inches if an inch. And that's husband-catching, if anything is. But they must ha' lost money to go and live at Beckland, and everything to be as plain as plain, so I hear tell."

In common with all the neighbourhood Chrissie believed that the Westaways had suddenly lost their fortune. Nothing else could have caused them to remove to such a "wisht" place as Beckland.

Yet, after all, it was night before Damaris knocked at Chrissie's door. For in these first days it was only after a great effort that she could summon up courage to see the girl who had wrecked so many fine dreams. For Damaris, like an architect, had pictured the temple she would build, had seen its pillared arches, even its very altar lights, the temple of Ambrose Velly's future. Day after day during the past winter it had been her great mental preoccupation, what her father could do for Ambrose when at last Mr. Velly had gone. Now the vision had been struck down by the hand of a little woman, who had given Ambrose what he valued most of all, the soft touches, the passion of a woman.

Yet, in reality, Damaris knew that it was herself that she grieved for, herself who had failed in her woman's power; for the bitterest sting that a woman ever knows comes from the knowledge that she has failed in charm, in a power that the lightest fool can wield, the force that is denied to her own wit, intelligence and mastery. Deep down, 'tis the woman's hell, and a hell, too, that some of the greatest women have known.

"Thyrza's gone upstairs to bed," said Chrissie, to the visitor, "but I'll call her down, if you like."

"No, no; don't do that. I'd rather go up to her, if you don't mind, Mrs. Rosevear," said Damaris. "You've been a good friend to her, indeed."

"If I'd been a better, things wouldn't ha' come to this pass," said Chrissie tartly, for in the career of benevolence she felt her nose rather put out of joint by Damaris as a rival philanthropist.

Damaris ran upstairs and tapped at Thyrza's door. All the country round was wrapped in the dead quiet that rests like a heavy hand on a sleepless brain. Somehow Damaris felt it to be easier to touch the quick of things on a night like this, when everything trivial is put out of sight.

"Don't be frightened," she said, with a smile, as Thyrza's startled eyes met hers above the yellow streak of candlelight that faintly irradiated the blue shadows of the little whitewashed room.

"Come over to the window-seat," she went on, wrapping the rug from the bed around Thyrza's white-clad body. "I've got something, some plan to propose to you."

"Oh, how soft and warm you are, child!" she exclaimed, as the girl's stiff body, at first rigid from shyness, gradually relaxed into restfulness in her arms. Damaris was deliberately encouraging all the kindness towards Thyrza that she could manage to call up in herself.

"You didn't sleep last night, I believe?" said Thyrza, looking up at her, and thinking that she looked as beautiful as the moon-crescent that scudded across the sky outside between the flying clouds.

"I've been thinking a good deal about you, Thyrza, lately, and wondering how I could help you and Ambrose."

"I don't see what call there is for you to bother about us. We'll rub along somehow, I reckon. Anyway, we've no claim on you."

"Ah, but it's that 'rubbing along' that I want to prevent if I can. I want things to be all right for both of you."

"For him you mean," said Thyrza, restlessly trying to free herself from Damaris's arms.

"And for you, because you belong to him," said Damaris truthfully. "After you're married, you and he, I want you to come to live with my father and me at Beckland, while Ambrose goes away to his work and gets on with it for a few months."

"To live with you?" said Thyrza wonderingly. "What for?"

"As my friend, to be my friend. You know I shall have to do all the housework there; for we're going to live like quite poor people. You can help me if you like, but I want you to stay with me."

"You want to make me a lady?"

"I want to make you a good, true woman, Thyrza."

"Ay, I've not been that, for it wasn't all his fault. I wanted 'en terrible, and I've heard folks say 'tis as certain a thing as death and taxes when a man loves 'ee."

She was trying clumsily to soothe the pain she divined in Damaris.

"We'll put all that behind us," said Damaris; "let it be as though it had never been and begin again—a new life, a life of honour and noble things. We'll start on your wedding day, and look forward, never backward. And you'll come to live with me? I thought you might go away with Ambrose for a week and then, when he goes on to Bideford, you can come straight to me. I shall be very glad to have you, for Beckland will be lonely at first. Still, we've all the summer before us."

"I don't like to. But I could do the rough work for 'ee; you've never been used to that."

"Then, that's settled and—I'm going to give you your wedding dress. I shall get it made for you and come over and see you married in it."

"Oh, you are good," said Thyrza, lifting her lips shyly to Damaris's cheek.

They sat for a long time, thinking of the unseen love that lay at the back of all this.

"I want you to listen to something that matters very much," said Damaris at last. "You know the world is mostly carried on by men."

"Oh, I hate 'em—deep down. They don't know anything about what it feels to be a woman. They only feel anything once in an hour, and a woman feels all the time.

Thyrza was not far wrong; if Nature had seen fit to make man on the same day as woman, so that they might have understood one another occasionally, this vale of tears would have been lightened of half its misery.

"Yet you told me once," said Damaris, "that you minded them no more than angle-twitches. But listen to me. Men grow the food for us and carry it where it is wanted. They teach and they fight and they make the laws and carry them out."

"My daddy," said Thyrza, "used to say that the law is crueller than a poacher's gin."

"So it may be. But I want you to understand what I'm going to say. It's this: there's only one thing the world in general asks of us women. And it's the greatest thing that the world needs; greater than laws, than food, than medicine, than books, or beautiful buildings."

Thyrza opened the eyes of a perplexed rabbit, and Damaris pressed her lips to the little curved bow beneath her own.

"Do you know what it is, Thyrza?"

Thyrza shook her head in awe-stricken silence.

"It's men and women," said Damaris with a break in her voice. "Little men and women; clean, rosy, and strong, full of good brains and fine blood. It's what you have under your heart, child."

The two women clung together passionately. Thyrza understood perfectly.

"I know," she said, with trembling lips.

"Yes, but listen," said Damaris, anxiously; "to give this to the world means noble women, not animals merely who bear and suckle, but women with pure thoughts and great hearts. Child, do you know the world's full of pain and misery that can only be bettered by great men and women —a new race, finer than any known before? There's food enough, clothes enough, enough of everything but fine human beings."

"Why aren't they here?"

"Because we're little, mean, paltry, we women. We've never risen to the call of the world. We've borne the children the men give us ignobly, ignorantly, as slaves, not free women."

But Thyrza could not follow this.

"I'd fight for it," she said; "I know that. I wanted it. I want it now."

For a second's space Damaris looked forward with dismay to the task before her in the months to come, the attempt to lead this little summer fly to the level of life's great argument. Then her heart smote her, for how could this child be expected to look backwards and forwards, as a trained mind would, over the human story? How could she know how to gain strength for hard things by impersonal thought? Even in her own trouble the comfort to be derived from lifting the eyes to the hills was only momentary, just the oblivion of a second's unconsciousness to a soul on the rack. She would try the plain truth.

"Do you love Ambrose?" she asked.

"Iss, dearly," nodded Thyrza.

"So do I," said Damaris, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Then why don't 'ee take 'en? Oh, you could if you tried. There's nobody in the world he thinks so great as you. He told me how John Darracott come to 'ee, and how you sent 'en to me that night, when I tried to die."

"Thyrza, do you know, if I were you, I should be proud to think how men so good as John Darracott think of me."

"He doesn't know this—bad thing of me, does he?"

"No, Thyrza. He only knows you're going to be married. He went away, I hear, last week."

"He's good," said Thyrza, thinking how once she had tried to help so strong a man. It was the sweetest memory in her life.

"And," she said, "he's written it all out, what he did that night, I mean. So everybody knows?"

"Yes," said Damaris, quietly.

"Oh, I've been bad, I've been bad," sobbed Thyrza.

"I never can go back over the road. Even John Darracott's deceived in me. Oh, I wish I had died that day! But I couldn't. Life was too strong in me."

"And," said Damaris, firmly, "there's another life that, I trust, was too strong for you. For your child is now the task you have before you. Give him every gift you can; strength and health and purity of thought."

"What, you ask that of—me, when you know what I've done?"

"I ask it of you the more, for it is your atonement; the only one you can offer, and the most splendid that anybody could offer. Will you try, Thyrza?"

"Why do you take all this trouble to help me?"

"Because I love Ambrose too well to see him drag anyone to the low levels of things, because I know he will have a splendid life, if we women let him."

"And so you won't lift a finger to have 'en, though you could, for he's took the cream off me? Eh, my Lord; I couldn't have done what you have; I couldn't never ha' done it. But I will try, same as I would ha' tried alone, if you hadn't fetched me back."

All along the roadway of existence march the human lives, each with a little glow-worm of light, called personal happiness. Some never see more than their own beam of happiness, and the many millions walking the same way are but to them as shadows. Such folk are the happiest; for to see the other lights, to watch how one obscures the other's joy, is to multiply the possibilities of pain a hundredfold, even though it may steel the heart with courage to bear.

Damaris lay awake many hours that night in her bed at the inn, for she knew that Thyrza's words were true, that had she chosen to fight, she might have driven Thyrza to the wall—had she chosen to thrust aside all pity, that is. She recognized frankly that she was putting away her own happiness for the sake of the principle for which women have sacrificed so much, for the one law that is woman-made, the law of monogamy. And yet, not so; it was for Ambrose's honour and Thyrza's salvation, for the unborn child especially, that she was willing to take suffering herself. For all laws come to women in the form of hearts that agonise and shame that stings.

In the country peace a London picture returned to her, death-white with electric glare: the picture of a woman, fair and vivid, dressed in white, waiting at the edge of the pavement for her night's engagement, watching with keen eyes each man who passed in those hours when the wreckage of the sea of human life comes uppermost. To leave Thyrza hopeless would have been to plunge her into that nameless sea. Even for the sake of her own hunger, Damaris knew she could never do it.

Thus she learnt the meaning of the wisest words ever written, the true answer to the riddle of the Sphinx: *apprendre à souffrir, apprendre à mourir, c'est la gymnastique de l'Eternité, c'est le noviciat immortel*, even while in her ears sounded the patter of tiny feet so longed for, even while to her body came in thought the clasp of comrade arms—comrade arms, yet sweet with a nearness that no mere comradeship can ever give.

Damaris carried Thyrza back with her the next morning to stay at Beckland for a few days that she might see her future home. And right glad was Chrissie that she had gone, when on the following Saturday she saw Mrs. Velly approaching her cottage, the van from which she had just alighted disappearing round the corner of the inn.

"My dear days," said Chrissie to herself, "now the fat's in the fire, for missus'll never take a marriage like this easy, not she. But, thank the Lord, Thyrza'll not be home till late to-night. Not for all the king's gold would I have had they two meet just yet."

For the first time in her life, Mrs. Velly had acknowledged to herself that she was an old woman, with her grip on life perceptibly slackening, when Ambrose had curtly announced his approaching marriage to Thyrza. Pushed aside like a dead log, she said to herself, with a bitter tightening of the lips. The great preoccupation of her thoughts, the sale at the farm, faded completely from her mind, though before it had seemed like a testing of her life's efficiency, when all her household gear would be exposed to the gaze of strangers. It was the secret history of the last month that she was most bent on knowing, for that Ambrose had lied to her when he denied having met Thyrza was, of course, evident.

But Chrissie would know! Chrissie was, however, equally determined that Mrs. Velly, at any rate, should not know.

"So," said Mrs. Rosevear, as she seated her visitor, "you'm to have a wedding quick upon top of a funeral. Leastways, we shall have it, I should say."

"Chrissie, I think you've behaved shabbily, and that I'll say freely. If you'll believe me, I never heard a word of it, till it was all arranged."

"You don't say so, missus? He's been down here, too, pretty constant."

"Then you might have warned me."

"I never knowed a word about marriage till just a matter of ten days ago. And that I can say true."

"'Tis a poor tale. Thyrza Braund's not the wife for my son."

"Don't 'ee like it then, missus? Her's not exactly a managing sort of woman, 'tis true; but there, it might ha' been worse. Languishing her be, and husband-high, and all the brains'll run to milk for a good half-dozen years. But her might have been a maid that looked all ways for Christmas, with a squint; for you never know who he'll fix upon, when once a man's looking out."

"A squint in the eyes, you mean, Chrissie; and what's that to a squint in the nature. I tell you I'm not happy about it. There's something behind all this, for it to have been kept so quiet. And I warned him against her. The girl's soft, and he wants a wife as hard as nails. There's something behind all this."

"There mostly is, missus."

"Not the same as there is here, Chrissie," said Mrs. Velly firmly. "A pack of chillern he'll soon have, and that'll be ruination to all the fine plans he's so full of."

"Well, I never! said Mrs. Rosevear, looking round frantically for a distraction, now that her visitor was coming to the point.

It came, like a flash of inspiration, in the shape of fat Mrs. Vaggers waddling across the common. "He might have started in at once with a family, as Mrs. Vaggers over there did.

"Mrs. Vaggers!" she shouted down the street. "Mrs. Vaggers, my dear, come in here and tell Mrs. Velly how you got took in."

The black-eyed, lusty woman, her eyes shining with good humour, turned back, and leaning her hand on the low half-door, flashed her strong, white teeth in a gleam of laughter.

"Come in, Mrs. Vaggers, come in," said Mrs. Rosevear, unhasping the door, while Mrs. Velly glowered sullenly at the visitor. She had a shrewd suspicion that Chrissie wished for the presence of a third person, in order to avoid awkward questions.

"Got took in," said Mrs. Vaggers; "you mean by my Sam? Law, I've told it so often. You must be tired o' hearing of it."

"Go on, my dear," persisted Chrissie.

"Well," she said, turning to Mrs. Velly. "I come down to Dartmouth to help my first man keep the 'Jolly Sailors,' which is more of a seaman's lodging-house than aught else. So I seed a deal o' men, one way and the other; and when I was widow and looking around a bit, I thought to myself that it would need a sharp chap to take me in."

"And were you?" asked Mrs. Velly politely.

"Shameful. First there come two or three that I didn't take no stock in. And then come Sam." She paused dramatically. "I thought I liked the looks of 'en, but after he'd been nibbling a bit, so to say, I didn't feel exactly sure of 'en, till one day he comes and says, 'Little wife,' tender-like. Then thought I, 'That's talking, that is.'

"Now it so happened that Sam and I were sitting down one on each side of the fire, with the picture of my first up over the mantelpiece. Now Sam was a bit suspicious of me, for he knowed I was a widow and thought there might have been more besides, and at last he put it plain.

"'There isn't any behinds, is there, Liza?'

"And with the words down came the picture of my first scat on the rug betwixt us. And then I thought, it shall be a sign, for if he says a word against that dear, good, sainted man, I won't have 'en. But he didn't, for he just picked up the picture and wiped off the dust from the glass, for it was all cracked across the face.

"'Never mind, Liza,' says he. 'I'll get 'ee a new glass to-morrow.'

"And I said, 'Sam, I'll have 'ee, for you're a good man.'

"The very next week he had to go to hospital, for he'd had yellow jack twice, and it left 'en queer. And one night matron sent for me to sit up with 'en, for they had a press of work. And 'twas a mercy that I did, for being off his head he talked a deal, and by his talk he had enough behind en to scare any woman."

"A wife?" asked Mrs. Velly.

"And chillern, my dear. And how many it was, whether four or forty, I couldn't make out. But when he come out of hospital I charged 'en with it plain, and he couldn't deny it.

"'Liza, it's true,' he said, 'but I couldn't bring my tongue to tell 'ee. But her's been dead nigh upon a year. That I swear. Come up to Plymouth, and I'll prove it.'"

"And you went?"

"I did. I was bound to see the outs of it now. And a cheerful sort of day we had to Plymouth. First to the cemetery we went, and then he took me to the woman who'd nursed his wife, and said she—

"'A beautiful corpse she made. Made flowers, forget-me-nots, stuck all round her face, too, and heartsease, like watered silk, on the frills of her coffin. For he's a good man, is Sam, and the best of biscuits and peppermint water, as hot as hot, to the funeral.'"

"And the chillern?"

"I sort of shied off 'em at first. Then he took me to see the eldest boy—he lived as errand-boy to a grocer.

"'Now,' says Sam, 'we'll go and look for Maria. I've boarded her.' When this had been going on for hours, or so it seemed, I said all of a burst—

"'Sam, for goodness sake, how many is it?'

"'Six, Liza,' says he, just as sudden, 'not counting the baby.'

"'Which makes seven,' said I, all weak-like. I didn't know where to look, or what to do, that's flat. But as I worked through that family it seemed they got weaker and dirtier and thinner. And the little maid, the baby, finished it. A poor little thin soul, with a peaked face you could barely see for the dirt of it, and bones pretty nigh coming through the skin. Bound for Kingdom Come plain enough if her stayed with the hussy he'd paid to look after her. The little thing just cuddled into me with a sigh, and shut her eyes all peaceful-like, when I took her."

There was a silence in the room, but the mother-heart of a childless woman spoke quite clearly.

"I took 'em all home save the eldest," Mrs. Vaggers went on quietly, "and by the time I'd got the baby in a tub of hot water, with the soapsuds flying, and her saucepan of milk on the fire, I saw plain.

"'Here,' I said to Sam, who sot and sot, looking sheepish on the edge of a chair, 'get out of this, and go and have the banns put up at once, for if I'm to be the mother of seven, I'd better see the thing through proper. For 'tis bare decent as 'tis. And don't you let me set eyes on 'ee till 'tis over.'"

Just then a little pinafored maid, as fat as a round rabbit, raced by the corner of the cottage.

"There's the baby," said Chrissie, hurrying out. "There's peeper's! there's diments!" said she, setting Sam's youngest on the cottage table. The little one's kiss was as sweet as the honey-butter scent of the gorse in the moor wind. And Mrs. Vaggers was happy, for the way of a childless woman is strange; but the way of a man with his house to keep in order is wondrous cunning.

"Ay," said Mrs. Velly, as Mrs. Vaggers took her leave, "that's all very well. Putting me off, that's what you're doing. For that I'm sure of. There's something wrong behind it all. Out of Ambrose there's not a word to be got. And what I should like to know is why Miss Westaway's meddling. Why should my son's wife go to live with her? Chrissie, has it been all straight up and down courtship or—is he forced to it?"

"There now," cried Mrs. Rosevear, bustling away, "that fire's going home, and John'll be back in less than ten minutes. You'll stay and have a cup of tea, won't 'ee, missus?"

But Mrs. Velly shook her head.

"Do you know what I've got in my mind to do?" she asked slowly. "There's a little two-roomed cottage up at Beckland, close to where Miss Damaris Westaway's going to keep my son's wife to live. I shall go there. 'Tis as cheap a place as I shall get anywhere. I've been kept out of things that concern my own son. I'm bound to know the rights of it—and I shall know if I go to Beckland, for there is but three houses there in all, each but a couple of stones' throw from one another. I'll be at their very doorstep."

"If 'twas me, I wouldn't so much as look round a corner where I thought there was trouble waiting," said Mrs. Rosevear.

"That's not my way," said Mrs. Velly, "for I'd feel it was there, if I didn't look. And after all, by looking I might prove it wasn't there."

"'Tis mostly there," said Chrissie significantly, "but I'd rather not know. I'm like the woman who heard her husband talking in his sleep and calling out, 'Polly, my dear,' her own name being Sally. 'Wake up, John,' said she, digging 'en in the ribs, 'wake up and don't be a fool.' A wise woman that, for if her'd listened more, her might have known more."

"Chrissie," said Mrs. Velly quietly, "you know my meaning all this time. Is it all straight, as far as you know, between my son and that girl?"

"'Tis but an old maggot you've got in your head," protested Mrs. Rosevear.

"Chrissie, is it all straight as far as you know?" repeated Mrs. Velly solemnly.

"So far as I know 'tis all as straight as my first man's eyes," said Chrissie quietly. "And cross-eyed they was to be sure," she added to herself.

But Mrs. Velly had never made the acquaintance of Mrs. Rosevear's first husband, and thus the cryptic meaning was hidden from her. She departed somewhat comforted.

"May the Lord forgive me," said Chrissie to herself, as she watched the carrier's cart drive out of the village. "But what's the good of stirring up ill-blood anyway?" she continued, "and Jim Braund's daughter couldn't be expected to set more store on 'Will 'ee have this woman?' on a passon's lips than any old seagull."

In the watches of the night it occurred to her that she had been extraordinarily clever. She chuckled till she woke her husband.

"Chrissie," said he crossly, "what be 'bout? The bed's heaving like a ground sea under a man."

"And I didn't say more than the truth," she murmured ecstatically, paying no attention to his plaints.

On the morning of the wedding Damaris drove over to Bradworthy. As she entered the room where the bride was dressing, she found Thyrza standing in front of the looking-glass, gazing ruefully at her own image. Hearing the noise of the opening door she turned, exclaiming—

"Oh, look at this grey rag that you've made me wear! It makes me a proper old guy. I'll not go to church in it. I'll not be seen in it. I believe you got it to spite me."

Then she flung herself, face downwards, on the bed. It was true enough, as Damaris confessed to herself, that the plain grey dress ought to have been exchanged for rose-pink. The child was now a rosebud set in the sheath of a pale jonquil. To Damaris, who had been nerving herself for the painful ordeal at the church, this was a totally unexpected tragedy.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that I made such a mistake. See, I've brought you a present from father, the loveliest white lilies he could get."

Thyrza wriggled pettishly away from the hand on her shoulder.

"Oh," she sobbed, tapping her foot furiously against the bottom of the bed, "you're always right, you're the pink of perfection and I'm as common as dirt. I won't do anything you ask. I won't be married."

Damaris stood for a moment, realising, as she had not done before, the magnitude of the task she had undertaken.

"Thyrza," whispered Damaris at last, "think of how you're going to be with the man you love so dearly. And after a little while you'll be with him always. When I think of the lonely women there are in the world, I like to think of those who have a joy like yours."

Her voice broke, and Thyrza looked up.

"Are you going to spoil it all for the sake of a dress, you who were so brave when you thought of giving him up? Think of how terrible things might have been for you."

"Because I'm so bad, you mean?"

"No; because you were reckless. There's a far bigger debt to pay in this world for recklessness than for real wickedness."

"Grapes are sour, I reckon. That's why you run me down." Something like hate gleamed out of the feverish eyes that watched her mentor. "You hadn't the chance of 'en. I had, and I took it, and I'm glad I did. So there!"

Thyrza stood pettishly twisting the lace on the white silk blouse that was the only sartorial satisfaction of the day.

"Oh," she cried to herself, "she's perfect, she is. She never tells crams; she can talk French and keep her temper. And I've said I'll go and live with her."

With trembling hands she pretended to be absorbed in the grey hat on the bed, touching it gently with her fingertips.

"I'm sorry," she said, turning suddenly to Damaris, who stood watching her. "Only this day seems so sad somehow. It's all gone wrong, and I dread to see his very face to-day. But I'll never be bad to 'ee again. Never."

"I know, I know," said Damaris. "But it'll be all right, once you're away with him. See, I shall pour eau-de-Cologne into this water, and then you must bathe your eyes thoroughly."

The little face, cold and scented, was held up a few minutes later for the kiss of repentance.

"You mustn't get into such rages, Thyrza."

"Mother used to sclum father's face."

"But Ambrose wouldn't like that," protested Damaris.

"He's got too beautiful a face to be sclummed, I reckon," said Thyrza dimpling.

Soon afterwards at the gate of the churchyard, where the light lay golden across the path, Damaris stood watching them start for their week together. Suddenly Ambrose turned and, standing bareheaded in front of her for a moment, caught her hand. In that moment there flashed across him the knowledge that other things, besides his mother's ease of mind, were being sacrificed for Thyrza's honour.

"How can I pay back?" he asked in a low voice.

"When the vision stands in stone everything will be paid," she said, turning quickly away lest he should see her eyes too closely.

CHAPTER XV

THE MANES OF THE MIGHTY DEAD

THE two partners of the firm of Trevithick and Jerman, architects and land surveyors, which Ambrose had joined as "improver," were known in Bideford as Dignity and Impudence, or the Lion and the Rat, for the junior partner, who could not possibly be called a mouse, found his work cut out for him in the task of releasing Mr. Trevithick from all manner of financial snares into which he was driven by his easy-going nature. The firm had a first class reputation for thorough workmanship; it was also, which is by no means always a logical conclusion, on a good business footing, thanks to the smartness of the rat, Mr. Jerman.

The motto of a small country town is usually, "If I don't get there to-day, I shall to-morrow," but there was nothing of that spirit about Trevithick and Jerman, as long, at least, as the junior partner was about; for then everything in the great house, with its plate glass and polished windows, ran on oiled wheels, including even the great terrors of the country architect, the pupils. Then even Dicky Dick, otherwise Mr. Richard Cobbledick, the gay dog of the students' room, put his tail between his legs and humbly plied the pencil and red-rubber of his profession. Especially the red-rubber, it may be said in passing, for he was a hopelessly inaccurate person, and only remained in the business because his father was a rich man and had paid a particularly large premium for him.

From the corner of the pupils' quarters which had been assigned to Ambrose he could catch the tones of Mr. Jerman's voice as he interviewed the clients in his private room. Dicky Dick called that room, indeed, the rough filter-bed, for the first interview with a prospective client always took place there, and was of a monetary character chiefly. If that aspect of the case seemed satisfactory, the visitor went upstairs to the brain of the establishment, the great room overhead, looking down on the famous bridge of Bideford, where lived Mr. Trevithick, far from the noise of opening doors and the murmur of voices, which were apt, in fact, to be very loud indeed on the rare occasions when Mr. Jerman took a holiday. Then pandemonium reigned among the articled pupils; for in a country office one of the chief difficulties, next to the general "tightness" of money is the rombustious nature of the untamed country lads who pass through the mill there.

It was more than a fortnight before Ambrose was sent upstairs for Mr. Trevithick's inspection, but during these days he had, unknown to himself, been going through the ordeal of test at the hands of Mr. Jerman. His report on Ambrose was:—

First-class draughtsman, best we've ever had. Accurate at figures, remarkably so, considering he's the long-haired type. Writes a good hand, opens his eyes, and has a fair working knowledge of surveying. Wants pruning, but will shape well when his ears are cut.

The junior partner had a capital breed of terriers in his bachelor villa on the hill, and his phraseology was apt to be doggy. Hence he divided the pupils into long-haired and wiry, meaning by those synonyms, artistic and business-like.

At last the summons came for Ambrose to go to Mr. Trevithick's room, but, of course, the senior partner's great height and large, slow, kindly glance was a familiar enough sight as he passed through the offices below. It was a face more sympathetic than powerful, perhaps, yet his head was like his buildings, of a massive simplicity that caught the sunlight and threw the shadow almost like a feature of the natural landscape. His lips, too, could tighten, more especially over the matter of a slippery contractor. He had a way of repeating a sentence till it sounded like a fate, and, in truth, it often sealed the fate of some builder, especially when it ran to the tune of "all that concrete must come up," and when the concrete ran over a carelessly cemented drain.

Mr. Trevithick was Jerman's trial, and knew it; he was also a thorn in the flesh to his wife, and was perfectly aware of that fact, too. For he was apt to be very late in the mornings and to sit far into the night, working at the office sometimes till early morning. To Jerman and Mrs. Trevithick such habits were nothing better than intellectual debauchery, and for no kind of debauchery had they a grain of sympathy.

When Ambrose entered the room the senior partner was bending over two curious vessels, which his clerk of works had brought to him after the destruction of an old farmhouse. Each was a sort of basin cut out of a solid block of elvan, the igneous rock found intruding in granite beds, and each had a funnel-like aperture piercing its side.

"Come over here," said Mr. Trevithick, "and tell me what you make of these. They're only found down west, but I'm not quite sure what the use of them can have been."

Leaning back in his chair, he watched Ambrose as he took up one of the basins. Mr. Trevithick had just been reading Mr. Westaway's eulogium of the new pupil and the young man attracted him, especially after the sorrowful tale that the junior partner had just told him. For to Mr. Trevithick's malicious humour, poor Jerman's Puritanism, correct and prim to his least important button, was a source of delight. It appeared that last Sunday Ambrose and Dicky Dick had scandalised the town by shooting the arches of the bridge to the accompaniment of a war march from Ambrose Velly's fiddle. It would have gratified Jerman exceedingly to learn, which was the fact, that the damp, salt air had been most detrimental to the fiddle-strings.

"I've heard of these before," said Ambrose, after an examination of the basins, "but I've never seen one. I've heard my mother talk of them, though. They used to be fastened to the back of the wall in an open fireplace, and were used for scalding milk. The fire was lighted in the basin part and the funnel is for scraping out the ash. Then the pan of milk stood on the whole thing."

Though Ambrose did not know it at the time, much of his future fortune turned on this scrap of information.

"You've the makings of an archaeologist," said the senior partner. "Take any interest in it? It's a very important part of your profession, you know. For nobody has done more harm than the architects who try to restore buildings without any real knowledge of the old work they are touching."

"I've never been able to lay hands on much in the way of books about it," said Ambrose, "but I want to know more."

Mr. Trevithick's ears almost stood up with excitement, for here was a pupil who talked of books, no sickly, pigeon-breasted fellow, either, but manly, well-set-up and bronzed. He began to entertain hopes that here was the student he had waited for so long, especially knowing as he did, Jerman's grudge against "long-haired ones."

"Come over here," he said, opening the door into a back room that looked across the roofs of the town. "There are books, and you can have the run of them. There's a door on to the landing by which you can come in without disturbing me. Here's a translation of Viollet-le-Duc's book, and he's the most valuable companion an ambitious young architect can have."

Ambrose noticed his master's English-French pronunciation of the name, and his heart warmed to the man who, like himself, had known but few educational advantages.

"Now," said Mr. Trevithick, "I'm going to try an experiment with you, for you've had three years' experience, and this will put you on your mettle. I'm going to send you to draw up a report of the repairs needed for an old manor house. That is to say, I want you to draw a plan of the buildings, making notes as you go of what you think wants doing. Not decorating, but saving—d'ye take me? Get a plan of the drainage, too. Saving, that's the aim, mind, bits of masonry, traceried windows wanting repair, that sort of thing. Then, when you've done, you'll drive over with me and we'll go over it again according to my notions. Then we shall see how far they square, yours and mine."

Ambrose knew enough to recognise that a first-rate opportunity was being offered him.

"I'll do my best," he said earnestly.

"It's Tonacombe, over in Morwenstow. It'll take a day. You'd better ride over on a Saturday and then you needn't get back till Sunday night. That'll give you an hour or so in Hartland, for I'm told you are a married man."

Mr. Trevithick smiled at Ambrose's blush; all his troubles before him, said the senior partner to himself, and the eating of the apple behind; for he, too, had been a lad and was now a man with a wife.

"Tonacombe!" exclaimed Ambrose, "why, that's the place that belonged to my family long ago. I've got a plan of the house that I copied from the old records Mr. Westaway showed me."

"If you've got it with you here, I wish you'd fetch it and let me see it. It's lapsed now to an old London lawyer, who wishes to sell, for it isn't entailed. He wants it put ship-shape before it comes on the market."

"It was Velly land once, sir," said Ambrose.

The two spent the morning over the plan, while Jerman was fuming below at the delay in the morning's mail that was thus entailed, and when Ambrose returned to the students the whole room was red-hot with excitement at this prolonged interview with the Chief; the senior partner was known as the Chief and the junior as the Governor.

"Why," asked Ambrose as he walked away from the office that evening with Mr. Cobbledick, "is it that the Chief doesn't live in London? He's surely too good for a country practice."

"Mrs. Tre," said Dickie, pushing his hat back on his wiry red curls, "that's where the shoe pinches. She's set up an establishment here and goes about solemnly delivering visiting cards. She doesn't believe she would get it in town, and that's why he has to rot in this dead-and-alive hole."

To Ambrose it was a novel sensation to walk into Mrs. Trevithick's drawing-room next day; the huge mirrors, impertinent sofas and hermetically sealed windows made him giddy at first, and he was thankful to find himself finally at anchor on a chair, with a cup of what Mrs. Velly would have called dish-water in his hand. At last the mist of nervousness cleared, and he was able to appreciate Mrs. Trevithick's beautiful front of expensive hair. He had never seen so sprightly a thing on such a lined face—

a face that ought to have been framed in soft grey hair, as it actually was at the "private view" to which only her husband was admitted.

She was enlarging on the work of missions to Mr. Pearse, a fatherly person who refused tea, preferring a "high" one at home at six o'clock. It was an inelegant habit on his part, and annoyed Mrs. Trevithick almost as much as his trade. "Not to put too fine a point upon it," as Mr. Jerman would have said, he was a prosperous grocer, whose consciousness of his bank balance pervaded the air in his immediate neighbourhood. His wife sat next to Ambrose, with a white handkerchief outspread on her mourning gown; Mrs. Pearse was one of the women whose crape-edged veils carry more suggestion of "Brief life is here our portion" than any undertaker's funeral plumes.

In the background hovered Mr. Trevithick, watching with an amused face the lad's efforts to take part in a conversation that hurtled with abbreviations like C. M. S. and N. S. P. C. C. It was an island of rest to Ambrose when at last the conversational gymnastics landed him on one he knew well. Yet, as the Chief could see, this novel form of entertainment pleased the boy hugely, for to appear intelligent when you have no notion of what is going on is highly stimulating to the social sense. Before they finished Ambrose knew what C. M. S. meant, and was giving his opinion of the West African natives with great gusto. He was also quite familiar with Mrs. Trevithick's favourite phrase, "Then I thought of C. M. S.," and was laughing at her up his sleeve.

Yet, after all, his youthful insolence was quite wrong-headed. It is true that Mrs. Trevithick was something of a snob, yet she was by no means a hypocrite, and the work in the mission fields, "white for harvest," indeed, was, next to her husband, the genuine passion of the poor woman's life, the one link between her and the great world of unselfish thought for others. Every spring, when the bright sunshine made her long for pale greys and lavenders, she regularly bought dark dresses and put aside the sum saved, through their extra durability, for "C. M. S." True, she buzzed domestic details all day, yet the milk-bread required by her husband's indigestion was made by her own hands, for fear the cook's should prove unequal to that important task.

The trouble of the matter was that she was wrongly married, yet in blissful ignorance of the fact, in her adoration of the big idol whom she worried to death. She had, in fact, taken the senior, when she ought to have chosen the junior partner. Mr. Jerman, indeed, thought her perfection, when he played the flute to her piano accompaniment while Mr. Trevithick buried himself in his study.

"Heavens," said Ambrose to himself, as he followed the Pearses out of the room, "how does the Chief stand it! There isn't a breath of air in the house, mental or physical."

For a terrible catastrophe had happened; after the sweet nothings that Ambrose had been politely murmuring, he chanced to remark to Mrs. Pearse—

"What a beastly day," as he heard the fall of dripping rain.

There was a sudden silence that filled the room. Then Mrs. Pearse rose in her majesty and remarked—

"This is the day that the Lord hath made."

With crimson ears and abashed countenance Ambrose hurriedly took his leave, much comforted, however, by the suppressed laughter that convulsed Mr. Trevithick's great frame.

After such *simulacra* of human beings, it was delightful to feel that next Sunday he would be in the society of the frankly sincere people of Beckland. Yet there was a certain shrinking even in that thought, for Thyrza wrote that although Mrs. Velly had settled in her two-roomed cottage by the pond, she had never yet crossed the threshold of the Westaways' house. She had refused to be present at the wedding, and immediately after the sale at the farm had removed her furniture with Vinnicombe's help to Beckland. "Nobody gets on my nerves like mother," said Ambrose to himself, as he thought angrily of her manner of conducting the removal, seated, like any cottage woman in front of a cart piled up with feather-bed and eight-day clock, with chest of drawers and cooking utensils.

But on Ambrose's spirit annoyance weighed but lightly and in a few minutes he was hurrying up the hill again to go and call on Mrs. Pearse to apologise for his rude speech

"I'm so sorry I annoyed Mrs. Pearse this afternoon," he exclaimed, coming impulsively into the office at the back of the shop. "I said it quite without thinking."

Mr. Pearse, entirely oblivious of the fact that Ambrose had his tongue in his cheek, or at least the tip of it, was delighted with his frankness, and it ended in the lad going up to see "the young ladies," and singing duets with them till ten o'clock, for never in his life was he shy for more than five minutes, and he could talk missions with a bishop and bets with a barmaid with equal facility after ten minutes practice.

He was voted "a great acquisition" by the Pearses, and ended by lending Mr. Pearse *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, thereby laying one of the possible foundation stones of his own temptation. For the grocer was so struck with the artistic piety of the work that his mind turned in the direction of a beautiful house overlooking the sea, to which he could retire in the evening of his days. And in that scheme Ambrose was hereafter to be most intimately concerned. For, in truth, the dip into town life fired connecting trains of enterprise in all directions for young Velly's fortunes, as is usually the case with persons of marked vitality.

At the end of the week he was at Morwenstow, looking down for the first time on the house that had played so large a part in the inner drama of his fancy. Smiling in the grey peace of the centuries, Tonacombe lay before him, closed by high boundary walls and belfried against the clear sky, in the faint murmur of the sea music that had but to cross a field or two. Under his feet, as he walked up "the street," or walled outer passage to the gates, the ground reverberated in hollow tones, for from the house there runs an underground way to the cliffs, for use in the days when "the valley of the waves" was a wrecking stronghold and the squire's house the central fortress. The low shrubs set in green pots along "the street" are bent south-west by the prevailing wind, and in the wall opposite the door is a niche, probably for the doles that the great house distributed in monastic fashion to the poorer tenants.

Once within the dusk of the hall, past the triangular hole in the wall for the holy water stoup, the centuries roll back; the nineteenth century roars away in the hum of the steam-engine, the eighteenth fades in the snuff of its gallants and the silky sneers of its epigrams, the seventeenth clashes away in the strife of its dogmas, and the sixteenth shrills into oblivion in the lilting of pipe and tabor. The darker shadows, the whiter light, of mediaevalism come back once more. Through the long windows, lozenged and marked with armorial bearings, the light filters on panelled oak walls, on carved minstrel gallery and huge open fireplace. At the windows hung curtains that had once formed part of the household plenishing of that Armada dragon, that Drake, whose drums beat yet in the echoes of English seamanship. Tapestry was there with the totem of the Stuarts, the caterpillar sign, and the firedogs were marked with the Tudor rose. All these treasures would have to be removed, as soon as the workmen came, for safe preservation, until they were sold with the old place itself, or possibly separately.

In the ample vistas of such a house as Tonacombe the sense of personal dignity starts into being, for, chameleon-like, a man reflects his background. It takes a Bacon to loom majestic in a garret, but in an ancient manor-house even rusticity drops its loutishness and assumes the courtesy that comes of a sense of human worth.

With the plan he had copied in his hand, Ambrose made his inspection and wrote his notes, passing into the Queen Anne parlour panelled in painted deal, and thence to the oak-lined room that looks on the walled Pleasaunce.

"Winged steps," beloved of antiquaries, lead to the raised sea walk from which, as it roves over wooded combes and cliff fields, the eye catches glimpses of the Atlantic. In the sound of the mellow tones from the belfry, that once summoned as many as forty apprentices to meals, the internal completeness of an ancient country house is recalled. Without, it was supplied from deer paddock, cloth mill, fish-stews, and farm; within, from malt-house, still-room, bakery, and spinning wheel. Even now the log fire in the hall can be fed by timber blown down in the winter gales.

Here, in sight of the five staircases and five courts surrounded by granite walls, Ambrose heard not only the call of the past, but also of the future, as he wondered how long it would be before Tonacombe would be for sale. For the first time the question of the financial success of his career occurred to him, since ten years hence, with good luck, he might possibly be rich enough to buy the manor-house, for there was little enough land attached to it, merely a farm and the private grounds. To do that would be to lift the Velly fortunes straight out of the rut into which they had fallen; he thrilled even then with the thought of what it would mean to his mother.

Somehow the memories of the place brought with them the spiritual stimulus that had been present once or twice before in his life: in Exeter Cathedral with the boy's voice thrilling in his ears, in Damaris Westaway's eyes as she talked of the age-long task of man, in Thyrza's chanting of the love song of creation. For the unseen beauty that lies behind the seen pervaded every inch of these old walls, in the atmosphere of their honest past.

As he walked back to the Bush Inn the call of the place became so strong that it was almost like demoniac possession, and he began to feel a second Faust with the fatal black dog circling round him. Nor was the mystic suggestion of the pentagram wanting; for in the passage of the Bush Inn is a cross traced within a circle, a curious piece of mediaeval sacerdotalism, marking the place where the priest stood to bless the house.

"In the name of all the fiends at once," said Ambrose, standing within the circle and laughing to himself, "get thee behind me." For, indeed, at the moment, the strong craving to own these lands was no more than moonshine, as ungraspable as the long sunset ray that traced a path across the sea when he stood looking from the cliff across the valley of St. Morwenna, where the grey church juts up like a cliff defying the sea of wrath all around. For in the valley below the great shutter of Hennacliff all landward sounds were deadened by the roar of the seething world of breakers, lashed incessantly by the sting of the wind gusts. Yet here, as everywhere, over the natural features of the scene, the superimposed atmosphere of human effort floats like an aura, a finer body than the rock-shapes of cliff and valley. For St. Morwenna built her grey hermitage in the valley, and over her shrine is thrown the human radiance of a personality that speaks as surely in this sea-bordered valley as the force of race that meets us in a city; for here is the note of mysticism in the traditions of Hawker of Morwenstow, the priest who cherished his ewe lambs as daughters, and stood for quaint lovingkindness in the midst of the barbarism of nature and the cruelty of man.

The earth that has known us so long is now a whispering-gallery of past follies and bygone victories. In olden cities whole races speak, from the wool-weavers of Exeter who built the pillars of her cathedral, to the princely doges of Venice who helped to build empires. Yet in no spot does a pleasanter fragrance linger than in the one-man memories of Morwenstow cliffs, where the people still talk of the priest who was "like a king" among them.

Before he rode back in the evening, Ambrose stood for a moment at the cross-roads from which the cliffs can be seen. Here he felt himself a man with a past of some dignity, over in Bideford an unconsidered struggler; yet Bideford was the reality and Tonacombe the dream, and no bridge was there that could span the gulf between the two.

As Damaris stood at her window at Beckland next morning she heard a cry from the garden below, and looking down saw Thyrza running to meet her husband. Standing back for a moment she felt her eyes dimmed by a sudden mist of pain, and in her throbbing sense that the future must hold for her many moments like this, Damaris whispered the deathless words that consecrate the bliss of all uplifted souls—

"Go where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy cross."

Then she went down to greet the visitor, feeling intensely relieved at two things, however—that Mrs. Velly was away at Bradworthy with Chrissie Rosevear, and that she herself was to spend the day with Dr. Dayman.

At breakfast Ambrose was full of the beauties of Tonacombe, and Damaris left the two men poring over genealogies and maps and plans, with Thyrza, who had lost all her awe of Mr. Westaway, sitting by her husband's side, with her head pressed against his shoulder.

"Happy, little girl?" whispered Damaris, as she left.

"In Heaven," said Thyrza, and Damaris saw how tight was the hold she kept on Ambrose's hand.

The child had, indeed, been bearing the separation from her husband very bravely, and Damaris was glad, for all her own heartache, at this ray of sunshine that had come.

After lunch, in the peace of a Sunday afternoon, Dr. Dayman set himself to tackle a matter that had been disturbing him a good deal lately.

"Just you come over here," he said, flinging himself into a chair and passing a great silk handkerchief over his face. "Sit down opposite to me and listen to what I've got to say."

Damaris seated herself demurely, with crossed hands, waiting for the lecture she had been expecting for some time.

"I want to know what's the meaning of this caper?" he said, his slow, fish-like gaze absorbing her quiet placidity, and his big nose snuffing angrily at the sight of it.

"What caper?" said Damaris, with a provoking tilt of her chin.

"You know the caper I mean well enough. Aye, and you know the mutton to it, too."

"My dear doctor, I haven't seen you for three weeks and therefore I have got out of the way of taking huge conversational leaps."

"How long is that little wench going to hang on at Beckland?" he said, coming suddenly to the point.

"Until her husband can make a proper home for her," said Damaris calmly.

"I tell you what, Damaris, you're doing a very foolish thing. You are taking up a sort of responsibility for the lives of these two children, a responsibility that is quite out of your way."

"I am a grown-up woman. Am I to refuse responsibilities because I am too foolish or too cowardly to undertake them? Why should I wish to remain a baby all my life? I should take responsibilities enough if I were marrying. Then you would make no objection."

"You'd be meddling with your own life then, and even a woman has to accept the responsibility for that. But here, why, they'll be hanging round your neck, the pair of them, till the end of the chapter."

"I believe in his talents. I think he will some day be a great man, and I know that I can free him from a burden just at the moment when it will be hardest for him—at the start. Besides, by living with us his wife will have some chance of knowing how a gentlewoman acts. I shall go on doing what I am doing till there is no more need for it."

When Damaris took that tone he knew it was useless to argue.

"And she's a little cuss, too," said he. "I caught sight of her two days ago, picking flowers in a hayfield. For a bit of a joke I jumped down and leant over the gate."

"Dr. Dayman," laughed Damaris, "do you think you had better go on?"

"You're my mother-confessor, Princess, and always will be. I said: 'Hillo, little 'un, do you know how to make sweet hay?' At that she picked a great sheaf of the grass, twisted it into a strand, put her foot on the gate and flung the ring of it round my great face. Then she held up her lips. She knew how to make sweet hay. She'd be a pretty little toad for a man to find on his pillow."

"You acknowledge she's charming, then?"

"Well, I did think her so for a minute; but you and your father are too quixotic for me. Here's he signing away thousands and revelling in the process, and here are you living in the lives of these two as if they were your own people."

"It's nothing more than I have done before, or things like it. Why are you so concerned?"

"Because there's something at the back of it. I'm like Mrs. Velly. She won't rest till she knows—and I shan't, either. An honest woman, that, and a good plucked one. It was fine, the way she gave up pretty nearly everything to pay off the creditors."

"They're both fine, for there will be the rent paid to the last penny if Ambrose can do it. But my intervention here was imperative. Dr. Dayman, you shall know, if you like. She will stay with me till her child is born."

"And that's why you worked that marriage? Phew—o! So that's where they keep the cheese, as the rat said when the trap nipped him. But I don't know that it makes your action any wiser. Have you counted the cost, *all* the cost, to him and to you?"

"I've counted the cost to her, and that's quite enough for me," said Damaris quietly.

"God bless you, my dear!" said the old man simply. "I wish I'd known a woman like you when I was young. It would have saved me some regrets. And they say women can't stand by one another, too. For," he held up a forefinger, "let me tell you, I can see round a corner sometimes, and I know it's cost you more than you'll acknowledge."

As she looked up, he asked—

"Is it easier to bear without words, my dear?"

"Yes, please, Dr. Dayman," she answered, leaning against his shoulder for a minute.

And some people called Dr. Dayman rough.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CRADLE OF A CHILD

IN the scented wind of midsummer the elm trees swayed above the field; across the sky, like moving towers, floated the masses of cumulus cloud called "the cloud of the day"; a sighing breath of delicate sweetness fluttered above the billowy mass of dried hay in the field below the garden where Damaris was bending above a bed of seedlings. Over the gate came a husky voice that remarked—

"I've been to see the old dummun over yonder. Thought I, 'tis as well to know what's afore 'ee, if you can."

Damaris looked up to see old Grylls leaning on his stick to watch her labours. Occasionally he went further, and came into the garden to give her advice, or even actual assistance. He had often made himself useful in breaking up rough ground for her.

"Mrs. Velly, I suppose you mean. Well, do you think she'll be an addition to our colony?" asked Damaris.

"An eye like a gimlet and a nose like a scenting hound," said old Josh Grylls firmly, "and in a neighbour neither's exactly what you'd wish to pray for. But I'll tell 'ee all about it, missie," he added, taking a firmer hold on the stick on which he leant. "Yesterday morning I stepped across and stood in the woman's doorway. Her sat inside knitting for dear life.

"'Good morning, ma'am,' says I. 'Fine morning for the time of the year.'

"''Tis mostly fine in June,' says she.

"'Well,' thought I, 'that's true enough, though vinegary said.'

"'How's your health, ma'am?' I asked.

"'Health! I haven't any health,' snapped her.

"'Ay, you'm like me, naught but an aching carcass, ma'am.'

"'Health,' her says; 'if I thought upon my health, I should feel a pain fit to break my back, and a cruel stitch in my side, and an ache like nails in my head. But I've no time to think upon it.'

"''Tis the lumbagy with me, ma'am.'

"'Then I shouldn't ha' thought you'd best stand in the doorway, with the draught near cutting you in two,' saith she.

"'Now,' thought I, 'that's asking me in as near as a lone woman can go. So I thought I'd speak out.'

"'I'm a widowman,' said I, 'and never mean to leave the state. For I'm a plain man, and as long as I can fry a bit of bacon of a morning and shake a mat once a week, I'll keep clear of holy matrimony.'

"'Ay,' says she, 'saving Sally was your first. I've heard tell of her. Never opened her front door once for the week, and gave her stepson pasties made of eggs with dead chicks in 'em. Till he up and went. The worm that turned they call 'en hereabouts.'

"'Ay,' said I, 'but her didn't leave much after all, and I've to rub along on but little.' You see, missie, I wanted things put plain to her."

"I see," said Damaris with a laugh. The old man was intensely conscious of his store of money in the bank, and always on the look-out for man-traps.

"'Roast duck and onions yesterday,' sniffed Mrs. Velly, looking out t'other side of me, as if I didn't stand in the way.

"'The old gander looked terrible peaky and off his feed,' said I, 'and 'twas but to save 'en that I cut his throat. And the onions spoiling for want of pulling, too. Rusty bacon and hard cider is more in my line.'

"'And only enough for one,' saith she; 'thank 'ee for telling me. But there wasn't any need, I do assure you.'

"Do 'ee think 'tis all plain between us now, missie? For I wouldn't have her think I was making sheep's eyes at her for all the gold in the mint."

"Perfectly plain, Grylls," said Damaris. "I feel absolutely certain that Mrs. Velly hasn't the faintest idea of setting her cap at you."

He turned away reassured, and Damaris heard him chuckle as he crossed the green by the duck pond, his long white beard, that hung like a curtain from his lower lip, waving patriarchally against the rose-red of the sunset.

Between the three houses in the colony there had arisen a state of armed neutrality, maintained, like the peace of a mediaeval town, by the constant bearing of arms. For Mrs. Velly passed her days furiously knitting jerseys and raging at the way she had been displaced in her son's life by Thyrza, while Damaris resented the constant espionage to which she felt herself subjected. Finally, old Josh Grylls had been dragged into the circle of strife by his dread of Mrs. Velly. It fairly made his brain reel to see such a sudden incursion of human beings into his corner of the world where he had lived for years as lonely as a pelican. Only Mr. Westaway, immersed in his dreams of the house of hope that was rising in the welter of the city, and the ducks, absorbed in the toothsome scum of the pond, remained oblivious of this triangular duel. To Damaris the thought of the old woman's bitter vigil was a daily annoyance, for every one else in Beckland had some pleasant fountain of delight, even if it were no more than the flight of pigeons from the dovecote, or the springing of God's blessing out of the earth, as old Hooker hath it. But for Mrs. Velly there was nothing but lonely bitterness, as she brooded over the debt of £500 that yet remained owing.

At length came the earthquake that broke up this stagnation. One morning, as the two girls passed the window of Mrs. Velly's cottage, they saw a large picture propped up on the table. Damaris knew at once that it must have been placed there purposely, and at first she hoped that Thyrza had not seen it. But one glance at the girl's tense, white face undeceived her.

"I'm going in," said Thyrza in a quiet voice. "No, don't try to stop me. It's no use at all."

The next moment she had pushed open the door and was standing for the first time in her mother-in-law's cottage. Mrs. Velly looked up from her incessant knitting.

"Ay," she said, "I thought you'd catch sight of it when you passed. I put it there on purpose, for I wanted you to see that though he has got a wife, he hasn't yet forgotten his mother."

The three women stood facing the picture which seemed to bind their lives together in a mingled bond of love and hate. Mirrored in the still surface of a tree-encircled pool the pictured sunset flamed, casting on the water red reflections that faded into purple in the far distance.

"He sent you that?" asked Thyrza, turning to the old woman. Beneath her quiet tones there sounded an agony of jealousy that was bliss unspeakable to Mrs. Velly's bitter, lonely heart.

"Look, it's signed," she said, tilting the canvas slightly, till they could read the signature and the date in the corner.

"He's never sent me a picture," said Thyrza stupidly, being devoid of the pride that hides the sting of pain.

"Ah, well," laughed Mrs. Velly, "but there's been letters enough in all conscience. Do you think I haven't known why the postman never misses a day except Sunday? And there's been none for me for whole weeks at a time. Now we're even, I reckon. There's a midsummer madness that takes a man for a month or two, but that passes. You'll find, my lady, that you've had your day, like me."

Damaris's heart was beating painfully in face of this bare play of passion, for these women who faced one another, bitter-lipped across the narrow table, were beyond her interference.

Thyrza suddenly put up her hand to her collar, and then Damaris saw how white she was growing.

"Be careful," she cried to Mrs. Velly, "you're doing more harm than you know."

"Oh, I knew Thyrza's temper years before you ever set eyes on her," sneered the old woman. "And what a fuss because a man remembers the existence of his own mother. Besides——"

But she never finished her words, for the next moment Thyrza swayed forward, in instinctive appeal for mercy or help.

"You are a cruel woman," cried Damaris, moved outside her usual quietude.

But again no one paid any heed to her, for Mrs. Velly, at this sign of victory, was a changed woman. Putting her arm round Thyrza she helped her to the old couch, and, fetching water, held it to her lips, making her lie, white and spent, on the patchwork cushions.

"Eh, my pretty, my pretty," cooed the old woman, holding the girl to her. "Why did 'ee never tell me anything? Did you think I'd be cruel to my boy's wife? Why ever didn't you come straight to me in your trouble?"

Neither of the two, in the kinship of race and blood, even remembered the presence of Damaris.

"I was afraid," whispered Thyrza; "afraid you'd say I'd ruined 'en."

"But I knew it. I suspicioned it all the time, and it angered me that you went to others for help. My son's wife, the mother to be of my son's child," she said, rocking the girl to and fro in an agony of joy at the renewal of life.

Damaris slipped out unnoticed; beside these mothers o' men she felt a shadow from the dream world. The tears smarted in her eyes as she walked away, marvelling at the secrets of life that were hidden from her.

In the first gleam of dawn next day Damaris awoke, and looking down the shadowy corridors of the inner life expected to find them, as usual, full of nothing but memories and old fancies, driving one another round in wearisome iteration. But to-day, instead of the constant repetition of bygone scenes which forms the content of so many women's minds, she found a strange inward ferment; from subliminal depths below they came, ideas, fancies, pictures, scenes, characters, whirling like the cross currents that falling raindrops sometimes show. Slowly she began to disentangle the threads, fitting scene to character and linking pictures to people, wondering all the time what new birth had come to her. Before long, however, she had learnt to recognise that this was a gift born of sorrow and disappointment.

For here, to the woman, is the power of inspiration. Her personal grief becomes like the straining agony of the violins when they work upon the quivering nerves; it awakes her; it drives away the mental inertia that, given to a woman for safeguard in her child-bearing duties, prevents her from enjoying the actual strife of mental labour as a man does. In the sting of personal disappointment the mind seeks the narcotic of emotional creation. With the passing of the pain the power often goes, but meanwhile the writer, the actress, has been born. Were all the world full of happy women there would be no artists among them. For just as a man drinks because he likes it, and a woman because it brings forgetfulness, so the creative impulse in a woman is born of pain, not mentality. A wave of sorrow, the empty heart—and some new human dream: this is the history of a woman-artist's life.

Then, in the early mornings, Damaris began to write, with Danny, the long-bodied Scottish terrier that Dr. Dayman had given her as a consolation for Beckland, beside her. He learnt to watch for his mistress's footstep on these bright summer days, and to refrain from barking, as he ran from his kennel, with his long-nailed toes going patter, patter on the flags. Years after, whenever she looked at the pages of the "Beckland book," Damaris always heard the pattering of Danny's toes, though then he slept three feet down in mother earth, and his lush red tongue would never again lap milk from her early morning tea saucer.

They were good moments those, when Damaris felt herself coming into the birthright of power and the long beams cf sunlight, drowsy with the drone of bees, fell in bands of blessed gold before her eyes. For, like the seed in the earth, creative power must lie hidden in the darkness of death and winter, till it rise at the mandate of the life spirit. And in the thin shoot of green is joy unspeakable.

Yet Damaris still sometimes slept with her pillow wet with tears. For in the four-square walls of the city whose streets are golden, and even amidst the hymning of the psalms of victory, a woman misses the homely plant called heartsease, and the still homelier plant called lad's love, both of which grow in many a simple woman's garden plot, where the shouting of merry children sounds.

For Thyrza there was but one event in the day—the arrival of a letter from Ambrose. Every morning, with palpitating tremors, she lay in wait for the postman at the garden gate. Then there would come the sound of hurrying footsteps and a whisper, "It's come, it's come!"

"Well, how do you like this one?" asked Damaris, as she rolled out the dough for a pie, while Thyrza, curled up in the window-seat, pored over the day's joy. Every morning they discussed the quality of the letter, like connoisseurs over a brand of wine.

"I like the end, where it begins 'little wife,' very much," said Thyrza, following the lines with her finger, and saying the words over to herself. "But I don't care much for the rest. There's only three 'dearests' in the whole, and not a single 'darling,' though I ordered one. Most of it is just an answer to what you made me write."

The daily letter to Ambrose had been rather in the nature of a daily sorrow, till Damaris rashly undertook to assist in the composition of the scholarly portions, where Thyrza felt herself lost. It was all written in his wife's handwriting, and foolish Ambrose merely supposed that the child was mentally developing with tropic quickness. The Thyrza he knew best of all revealed herself in the circular kiss-marks, in the wail of longing, or in the passionate words of memory.

"There's something in it I don't like, though," said Thyrza suddenly. "There was a packet this morning, and it's got a present for my birthday."

"Well, Thyrza," said Damaris, briskly tapping her rolling-pin to get the flour off, "I don't see why you shouldn't have a packet, though it's a day too early. May I see?"

It was a gold buckle with Waller's lines engraved at the back:—

"A narrow compass! and yet there
Dwells all that's good, and all that's fair;
Give me but what this ribband bound,
Take all the rest the sun goes round."

"It's beautiful, and the grace of the thought is what I should like best if I were you," said Damaris.

"Oh, it isn't that I don't know it's beautiful. But somehow, 'tis so like Ambrose to send me this and no money. For," she added in a low voice, "I ought to pay something for my keep, and I did ask 'en for it and he never noticed. And there's all the debt that his mother remembers every hour. I didn't ought to have presents, with things like that. But he'd rather give presents than pay his debts."

Damaris was silent, for here was a sentiment of some subtlety from an unexpected quarter.

"Oh," cried Thyrza, "I love to think 'en perfect, and here I be talking about 'en like this."

"I know," said Damaris, "it's hard when one sees the spots in our sun. The happiest women never see them, I believe. They remain blind to the end, and remember this, a man never worries about little debts and little duties as women do. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill, Thyrza. And as for paying for your keep, you do that with your work."

"I give you such trouble about my lessons," said Thyrza in a low voice, "but you always want me to read about dead people, and I don't care to know what's over and done with ever so long ago. You seem to think more about what happened a hundred years ago than about what happens now."

"There isn't much that does happen now, is there?"

"There's Ambrose's letter always," said Thyrza naïvely. "There, you finish that," she said, thrusting her sewing at Damaris.

"Oh, Thyrza, Thyrza, what cobbling," sighed Damaris with a half-smile, as she inspected the work. She had constantly to play the part of Penelope, and rip out at night the work done by day on the cobwebby garments that Thyrza handled so lovingly and so inefficiently. "And have you read your history yet?" asked Damaris, lapsing virtuously into the schoolmistress.

"No; I forgot," said Thyrza mendaciously. "Ambrose won't love me any more for knowing who Drake was."

"Perhaps not," said Damaris with an edge in her voice; "but there are other things in the world for you besides Ambrose, I suppose."

"Only his baby," said Thyrza shamelessly, as she luxuriously stretched her arms to the radiant sky.

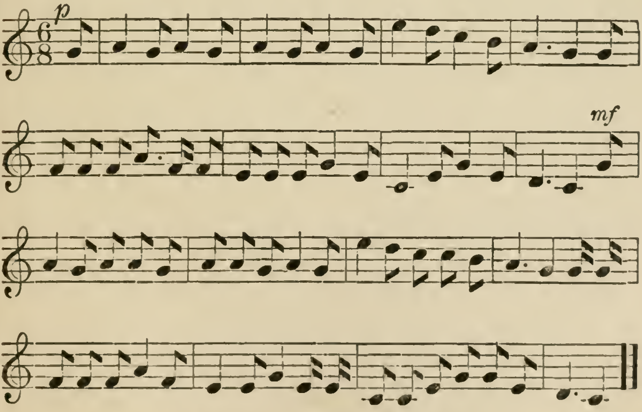
So it always ended. The *History of the English People* was usually defeat number one for Damaris, the French exercise, scribbled and illegible, always defeat number two, in this tussle of the studies.

On the other hand, Thyrza greedily devoured any story with a homely, familiar atmosphere, and *Silas Marner* was the greatest comfort in those days to poor Damaris, as she waged a losing fight with a mind devoid of background; for over the village pictures of that exquisite idyll Thyrza would pore by the hour. Damaris congratulated herself on the fact that the girl turned to it, instead of to the highly-spiced tales of fashionable life that she had feared would be the chief attraction for her in the book world. But there was, in truth, no trace of snobbery in such a child of the nature powers. At last, Thyrza's impulsive, outspoken womanliness, at once her greatest danger and her greatest charm, vanquished even her slack habit of prevaricating; for, as in a little animal, fear alone aroused deception in her, and she had no longer any fear of either Mr. Westaway or Damaris.

Ultimately Thyrza's preceptress gave up the struggle to educate by books, for a far older teacher than Damaris had taken the girl-wife by the hand, and as the glory of the summer noons widened into ever greater brilliance, Thyrza entered into the lyric rapture of natural motherhood, lapped like a child in the peace of happy waiting.

The sight of nature's wonder-working hand, indeed, taught Damaris the great lesson she needed. For the first effect of contact with the old devil of the flesh in women whose lives have been passed in nun-like seclusion is a strained seeking after spirituality. They become bitter maids, to whom the warmth of life is no better than the sun kissing carrion. Damaris was saved from this fate by learning, as she watched Thyrza, that even the flesh has its noble part to play in the growth of the spirit.

In her green dress, hatless and untrammelled, directly her share of the household work was done, Thyrza would start for the cliffs, where in some shaded cranny she would sit for hours, crooning to herself low snatches of the tunes she had learnt from Ambrose. Every evening Damaris could hear, as she returned, the notes of "The Wind Among the Barley."



"MOWING THE BARLEY."

By permission of the collectors of the *Folk Songs from Somerset*, Mr. Cecil J. Sharp and the Rev. Charles L. Marson.

Over and over again she sang them from a body pulsing with the sun's kiss and wild with the whisper of the sea wind. Then, poppy-sweet with sunshine and freshness, she would lie on the couch with Danny, often falling asleep to the sound of Mr. Westaway's voice as he read aloud some story of the childhood of the world. Every night she slept in moonlight or in starlight, and the languor of summer only strengthened the life-power of her heart, till even Ambrose's letters had little power to rouse her.

At night she would whisper to Damaris, "He's coming very near now. Every day he's coming faster and faster to me."

And it was not of Ambrose that she spoke.

But the radiant well-being ceased in Thyrza when the valleys began to fill every evening with "the cloud of the night," as country people call the low-lying meadow fogs, and as the sea-wind sighed o' nights across the window-panes. The touch of chill gave Thyrza a pinched look that only died away from her in the brilliant noonday sunshine.

Damaris sent for a white fur cloak, hoping that the warm luxury and beauty of the garment would soothe the child; but though she wore it gratefully enough, the spirit of sad restlessness increased, till, whenever the sea was moaning in the long nights, Damaris got into the habit of crossing from her own room to Thyrza's and lying down beside the little piece of magnetic life.

"I haven't been in rages much lately, have I?" asked Thyrza one night as they lay listening to the wind in the chimney-tops. "I remembered that I mustn't now."

"You've been very good," said Damaris.

"I'm not afraid with you, somehow," answered Thyrza.

"Why are you afraid, child?"

"'Tis all dark in front. Nobody knows what there may be waiting for a body."

"Do you mean in the future?"

"Iss; what's to be is hid. There's something behind the child. Behind all I know that's coming, there's something else."

"The child's father, you mean."

"No; I don't mean him. There's something else—waiting."

"You don't feel ill, do you, Thyrza?"

"Not a bit. 'Tisn't that; it's something a long way off. But I want to ask you to forgive me all for the way I wouldn't write my exercises. For I know that, deep down, you don't really love me—not really. You're only sorry because I've been light."

"Not now, Thyrza, not now," cried Damaris. "I own that once you seemed to me not really womanly, but I know that now there is the true woman being born."

Somehow, to Damaris, Thyrza seemed infinitely precious, a treasure won from the seven devils of spiritual emptiness. She put out her hand and touched her tenderly, as a child stealthily touches a beloved possession. For Thyrza was being star-led, like the wizards of old, to the cradle of a little child, where in the wonder of birth she was to put her hand on one of the secrets of the unseen from which life comes.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MYSTERY PLAY

OVER the tables in Mr. Trevithick's workroom the swing lights in their green shades threw circles of light on the great sheets of architect's plans that lay everywhere. From the open windows came, in the night stillness, the lapping of the water against the edge of the quay.

"Now," said the senior partner to Ambrose, as they both lit their pipes and leant back in their chairs, "what you want is staying power; you've no balance. You put furious energy into some simple task that doesn't want it—and then, ouf! you're down again, done, in body and mind. I believe you spend as much force cleaning your teeth of a morning as Cobbledick does over a day's work. Not that I want you to emulate Cobbledick's achievements."

Mr. Trevithick had a fine mellow voice, and his laugh was as kindly as his nature. The two men had been sitting till past midnight over a plan that ought to have been posted in the morning to the secretary of a committee. However, it was now gone, and Mr. Trevithick was perfectly aware that people who knew him allowed a margin when they named a time.

He now sat well into the fireplace, so that the smoke from his pipe might escape by the chimney. It was a habit derived from the time when, in his mother's cottage, he had been allowed one pipe a night—after she had gone to bed. The smoke regularly puffed into her room above from the chimney, but it gave her a homely feeling, and it is possible that the scent of Sam's pipe might have added a joy to the golden pavements up above, had a smoke-ring been suffered to escape through the interstices.

"I know, sir," said Ambrose, ruffling his hair; "but there are such a devilish number of tricks a fellow has to wring the neck of in himself."

Mr. Trevithick, who habitually understated in his desire to be accurate, hated strong language even more than the would-be smartness of epigram; he remained a peasant, with a peasant's suspicion of anything facile or glib. He went on more seriously, for he suspected Ambrose of a spice of flippancy.

"Now, that won't do. It may be all very well to fret and fume, for a great man who can live by two hours' concentrated labour; but you'll have to work all day and half the night for many a year to come."

With eyebrows raised almost to his thinning locks, Mr. Trevithick lectured on.

"In this trade a man who goes far has to run long, and that's all there is about it."

He watched a pupil in whom he was interested as he would have watched a new "staying" process, for to Mr. Trevithick the only difference between men and material was that, unfortunately, the men were not the same grain all through.

"Do you know why I never sent you again to Tonacombe?"

"I supposed it must be because the work was badly done."

"No; 'twasn't ill done." This was the highest praise ever extracted from the senior partner, who was never well, but always "middling," and never prosperous, but always "rubbing along." He had, in fact, nothing of the business instinct that makes a man perpetually seem busier than he is. "But you've got to learn to take what comes along. It was a bit of a lesson for you when Jerman gave it to another chap. But now that we've seen what you're like in the office, I want to put your nose to the grindstone at outside work. I'm going to send you over to Instow to work at that schoolhouse, and after a bit I shall put you there as clerk of works. There's too much theory about you; a bath of bricks and mortar's capital for that complaint."

Ambrose flushed rather angrily, for he had been at work all day and his nerves were on edge. Yet he knew that he was getting the best possible training, and he went back to his lodgings treading on air, to lie awake for hours in a brain-whirl of imaginary labours and difficulties. For a clerk of works has to pass, not only building stuff, but men, and is expected to guide his principal in the tender subject of money advances to builders, since he is on the spot and can tell a man's financial standing better than his chief who spends an hour or two at the works. It is a double test of grip and honesty, of sense and foresight.

The senior partner often said that he spent his time being ground fine between the nether millstone and the upper. Though his person was not affected thereby, his temper certainly was, for his clients wanted the utmost expenditure of effort from him at the smallest possible cost to themselves, and the pupils worked with one eye fixed on the clock. But in Ambrose he had found a pupil who would work after hours, toiling at the mechanical labour of specifications or plans as cheerfully at midnight as at mid-day, and Mrs. Trevithick saw less of her husband than ever, for the senior partner paid Ambrose for his help by opening up the stores of his experience. And in everything he did Mr. Trevithick gave good measure.

In the months that followed Ambrose learnt to love the tinkle of the mason's trowel, the tapping of the carpenter's hammer, the rattle and fall of loads of bricks. For there is a joy in the mastery of things that nothing else can give —in the handling of stone and clay a faint shadowing forth of the creative thrill that forms a universe from the germ of protoplasm. Yet, sometimes he felt a passing sense of regret, for in the hot noon of the workaday world his boyish visions seemed to have about them the still beauty of the dawn; so the woman in her kingdom may look back on the maid that once drew aside the curtains of life.

They were ugly, too, very often, these schoolrooms and chapels, very far indeed from the pillared vistas of his dreams. They even had the sash windows, which Ambrose, as a devout lover of Gothic, had learnt to abhor. Yet in material, at least, they were honest, and honesty in architecture is what truth is in theology, knowledge in law, and faithfulness in medicine—the supreme test of a man's worth.

"I suppose," said Mr. Pearse to Ambrose one night, as he met him coming back from work, "you couldn't spare a minute to look at a little lot I've got here?"

It was a mere *façon de parler* by way of apology, and Ambrose followed the grocer as far as a field, marked by one of those melancholy notice-boards that herald the approaching death of some bit of natural beauty on the outskirts of a town.

"Fine site, isn't it?" said Mr. Pearse. "I've just bought it, and I'm going to run up a villa here. We're tired of the racket of a business house, and the air's better up here."

"You'll come to us, I suppose," said Ambrose, thinking gleefully how the senior partner would squirm at the buttonholing that would be his portion at Mr. Pearse's hands.

"I'm coming to you," said he, with a twinkle. "You've taste, that I can see, and I'd like to give 'ee a leg up. Now, you can knock together a nice little plan for me, and if there are points in it that I haven't a mind to, why, we'll go over them together."

Mr. Pearse calculated that he was doing a good stroke of business for himself, since Mr. Trevithick, as befitted a master-workman, was autocratic, but with a 'prentice hand he himself could do all the planning as a hobby and quote enormously from *The Seven Lamps*. Besides, Ambrose would be cheap.

"Couldn't be done, Mr. Pearse," said Ambrose.

"Oh, come now. I'll make it worth your while, for I'm prepared to put my hand into my pocket, let me tell you. And when you're up in the world, William Pearse will be proud to remember he gave you your first order."

Ambrose laughed outright in joy at the man's naïve delight in his own patronage.

"No, no, Mr. Pearse," he said; "you see I'm in the firm of Trevithick and Jerman. I can't take private jobs, though, of course, I'm much flattered by your offer."

To Mr. Pearse's commercial experience this only signified "putting a figure on himself" on Ambrose's part. Accordingly he named his price for the plan and ultimately doubled it, but in vain, till at last he departed in high dudgeon at the airs of understrappers.

In nothing is it more true than in the handling of money that the hand gets engrained with what it works in, for its power suggests the sudden ease with which a man rises at the completion of a long, lonely task and goes out into the gay bustle of the streets. Especially by a man in Ambrose Velly's position everything is tried by the golden standard; for the thickness of walls, the depth of cement, the width of corridors, depend on this tiny symbol, and every opportunity of beauty and convenience is weighed in the balance of a cheque. As for himself, he sometimes felt like an Atlas heaving the muscles of his body to cast off the burdens that oppressed. Yet the mood of depression seldom lasted long; for it was the lures of the world, rather than its drawbacks, that provided a pitfall for Ambrose.

Mentally he was weak in construction as an architect, but strong in detailed ornament. He could sketch decorations for wall spaces, for cornices and niches, so rapidly that his fancy outstripped his hand. Every time the men at the office watched him work in this manner, he saw the vision of a school of designers, trained by himself, as by a craftsman of the Middle Ages. Behind all, there was the power, the uplift, that the grey walls of Tonacombe could give. For the land hunger bit sore in the days when a bed-sitting room in a row of brick-built boxes was his fate.

He knew the itch of power, though not the itch of covetousness.

Coming into the office next morning, he received a message to go straight up to the senior partner's room. He found Mr. Trevithick with his share of the morning's mail, the sifted portion that had passed the rough filter-bed below.

"Read that," he said, putting a letter into Ambrose's hand.

It was a request from a London firm that a good draughtsman should be sent at once for a two months' engagement on detailed drawings for several sets of designs that were wanted immediately.

"Like to go?" asked Mr. Trevithick.

It was good pay and it was London. Moreover, the work was well within his powers, and there would be a solid satisfaction in undertaking it. Yet he hesitated.

"You think you're too good for the work, perhaps," said Mr. Trevithick testily. He was apt to be gouty and snappish in the morning.

"That's not it, sir, at all. I should like the job very much, but I must let my wife know before I settle on anything."

"It'll do you good to get into fresher air, for you've pretty well sucked the ozone out of Bideford air. Not that it takes long to do that."

"I'd like to go. But it's my wife. I don't know that she'll want me to go so far."

"Feeling his chains a bit," shrugged Mr. Trevithick to himself. Aloud he said, "Ride over and see her this morning, and we'll wire to-night. That'll be soon enough."

"He'll go, if I know a woman when I see one," said the senior partner to himself as Ambrose left. For during her one visit to her husband at Bideford, Mr. Trevithick had been greatly struck by Thyrza's simple directness, her wide-eyed glance and freedom from pretence. Wife as she was, she retained the virginal touch that never leaves a woman who is a mere instrument of nature. Under the deepening influences of her life it almost touched austerity, and the austere is never more penetrating in charm than when it is suggested amidst the opulence of physical beauty. Such a woman as that would have, so Mr. Trevithick thought, but little of the merely feminine about her, and he was a good judge of the feminine, for he had made a life-long study of it in his wife. Yet, he understood Thyrza, whom he had seen for an hour, better than his wife, whom he had known for twenty years. For it is the people we live with whom we know least.

Ambrose, directed by Damaris, found his wife that afternoon on Wimbury Head, as she sat facing the dim lines of the far-off Welsh coast.

The surface of the sea, far below the ramparts of the prehistoric hill encampment, was heaving slowly in the wide breaths of placid sleep. In the west, from beneath the cloud that obscured the sun's disc, a mist of light, sulphurous-red in splendour like a gauze of blood, veiled all the distant peaks of the coast-line, till they vanished in a mystery of fire. Across the heaving steel-blue mirror of the sea the sun sent towards the east a long searchlight, that fell on the two tree-crowned cliffs that tower below the jutting tableland of Gallantry Bower. Slowly the red-gold ray glorified each peak in turn, transforming the rock-shapes into a summer of light and warmth, and, as it passed to the next cliff, leaving black chasms of darkness in the cavernous bays. Across the red ray, mid-way between cliff top, and wave-foam, seamews, hovering for a second, poised and floated into the surrounding shadow.

In this vision of splendour the senses were absorbed in the pleasure of sight, but as the grey depths conquered, the ear was filled once more with the roar of the ground sea that echoed along the whole coast, till nothing was left but the weaving of sound in a rhythm of ceaseless music.

From this Thyrza turned with a sense that she was no longer alone. She grew very pale when she saw who it was that disturbed her reverie, for a week-day visit from Ambrose was an unprecedented event.

"My dear," he said, drawing her down by his side, "I've got some good news for you. The Chief wants me to go to London as a draughtsman for a couple of months. He's a thorough good chap, and he throws chance after chance in my way. This will mean an opportunity to get in touch with the headquarters of things."

Thyrza shut her eyes for a moment, trying to realise how the busy whirlpool of city life must call to a man. Yet she could not do it, for in the little round of sameness that was hers, nothing could be stranger than the hurrying rush of a business man's life. All she knew was that he was going, and was glad to go. Yet she fought for self-possession.

"When do you go?" she asked quietly.

"To-morrow or next day, I suppose. If I can get off, that is. Aren't you glad for me? But I wish it wasn't just now."

"Oh, I'm glad you said that," she burst out, "for we may not meet again, you know."

"Thyrza, for God's sake, don't talk like that. I ought to have thought, but I'll not go. No, I'll tell the Chief how things stand."

"Oh, but you must go. I wouldn't keep you, for a man must go where his work calls him. But, Ambrose, there's something I want to talk to you about. It's this. We're taking too much from the Westaways; we've thrown ourselves on them as if we were helpless. I don't like it. You may not mind, but I do. For we're taking more than we can ever pay back. I ought to have gone to live with your mother, if I couldn't live with you."

"I don't feel that, for they both love you, my Thyrza."

"It's not for me they do it, it's for you."

"It's too late, now," he said, shrugging his shoulders with a dull sense of annoyance. "Oh, Thyrza, don't spoil the last minutes we can have together for ever so long."

She laughed. "What a child you are, Ambrose. If there was the leastest little sweet at the bottom of a barrel of shavings, you'd be sure to find it."

"Of course I would. That's my philosophy, and it's better than Marcus Aurelius or Confucius, or any philosophical Johnny whatsoever. Come, let's get into the sunshine. It's cold and dark here."

At this practical expression of his philosophy she laughed again, and as they walked along the cliff, following the sunlight, she grew reconciled to Ambrose's absence, for nothing in his living presence could long withstand his deep-seated happiness of disposition.

"It's been a wonderful summer," she said, "and when you come again there'll be something for you to see, perhaps. A new friend—a little, little friend, Ambrose."

She suddenly sobbed to herself in the luxury of self-pity.

"But," she continued, "I love you true, Ambrose, and you're to be a great man. Now that I've a man, and am soon to have a man-child, I must be great, too, and bear things."

It was her confession of faith.

Watching her, Ambrose weakened unaccountably. "I can't go and leave you like this," he said. "I really can't."

"Yes, you can," said Thyrza. It was a favourite phrase of his, and they had often laughed over it. Yet it was a fresh pang to Thyrza to remember the occasions on which he had used it. At last she whispered, "Now I want you to go and leave me here, for I don't want to see people just yet. After all, I'm almost glad it's happened; for you do care, and I wasn't quite sure you would. Now go and be a great man."

He laughed, as he held her for a moment, at this sketch of his future business in life. Yet it was a bitter moment, even to him.

When she looked round from the sun he was out of sight, hurrying down the headland as fast as his feet would carry him. At Beckland he found Mr. Westaway alone in the sitting-room, playing patience at the old "gate" table, which Danny hated, for the square frame of it got in his way. Damaris considered those games of patience a triumph on her part, for at first Mr. Westaway had abjured all the small alleviations of life, including patience and backgammon, in the austere monkishness that had become a mania with him.

One night she placed a small case of patience cards on his writing-table and silently watched the effect of suggestion when her father came in, tired from an afternoon's gardening. She laughed softly as he took up the case and, automatically dealing out the cards, began a game.

It was incomprehensible to him when, in a sudden outburst of pleasure at her own perspicacity, she implanted a kiss on the back of his head. Then it dawned on him.

"Well, well," he said, "here I am at my old tricks again. But where did the cards come from?"

"I sent for them," laughed Damaris, happy at seeing him return to some of his old ways.

Ambrose thought that Mr. Westaway's changed method of life had added years to his age. The sudden upheaval of his will, that had ended in his leaving the Church, seemed almost a last effort of expiring vitality. For every new environment demands fresh powers of reaction, powers in which old age is necessarily deficient. One must be young to enjoy experiment, and it was a hard deprivation for Mr. Westaway to miss the routine of a bustling life of small engagements, and harder still to feel that all his effort would leave hardly a ripple on the sea of life. Merely a new type of institution and an empty protest against the current of the day's thought.

For Mr. Westaway longed vainly, like many men of his generation, for some great conception that should ennoble both personal and national life. Yet, in the shifting sands of a period of religious transition, he found nothing solid in the creeds, nothing noble in the material politics of his day, for the mean success of commercialism has, for the time, belittled our hopes of human greatness. Sadly, then, he raised an altar to an unknown God, who rules by causes that are hard to see and effects that are harder still to bear. Yet, like many thinkers before him, he found comfort in the simple tasks of helpfulness, and every stone of the new building that was rising in London, every medical discovery that could affect child-life, was followed by him with an intensity of imaginative sympathy that was heightened by his delicate health and consequent aloofness from the concerns of active life.

When Ambrose had gone, Damaris went out to the yard behind to search in the hen-house for eggs wherewith to make pancakes for Thyrza's supper, while Mrs. Velly stood watching her son ride away. Then the two women glanced across the duck pond at one another, with a thought in common of Thyrza to whom his departure would be a great sorrow. For the waiting time that is woman's special lot had drawn the women at Beckland very close together.

When Thyrza at last returned Damaris caught her cold hands. "My dear," she exclaimed, "you're so cold. Why did you stay so late?"

"I was getting used to things," said Thyrza, "and it took a time; for self's like an onion that'll spoil a dozen pans of milk and come up as strong as ever in the boiling."

Then she added, with a quaver, "Did you see 'en?"

"Yes," said Damaris, "and in two months' time he'll be back."

"And he'll be here, too," said Thyrza with an April smile. For to these women "he" was already an inmate of Beckland, and his wardrobe was nightly smoothed by his mother's dimpled hands.

Had they sufficiently realised Ambrose Velly's life during these first London months, Damaris and Thyrza would have recognised in his letters the most promising augury for the future. For that they came regularly was proof positive of the hold a kindly tenderness still exercised over him.

To a sensitive mind the first inrush of city life is overwhelming, confusing, even painful, like the pressing urgency of a great crowd. It swamps all past experience in a violent outburst of new sensations, till out of the ferment of stimulus the mind begins to distinguish the separate strands of influence that work on it.

It is common to speak of the temptations of great cities; it would be more true to speak of the infinite uplift provided by the spectacle of effort all round, of active continuous effort in every direction, of effort to conquer, to win, to gain a share of the good things on the splendidly furnished tables of life. To pass from office to street, from shop to theatre, from Westminster to the Inns of Court, is like being in the centre of a magnetic storm. It is truly the greatest magnetic storm ever experienced on our planet, this city life, for the electrical flow that carries our messages is nothing beside the human will to live that eddies all around.

Ambrose bathed in it, till the sense of life thrilled in brain and nerve fibre, driving out the passion of the flesh for the time, and substituting a finer ferment. By the side of this fiery flow of the higher energies the country air seemed leaden. In the city the atmosphere was tense with the fighting instincts. When the great lights flared and the sky-signs gleamed under the stars, Ambrose felt one unit of the procession of life that passes, falls often, stumbling in the darkness—but sometimes wins. He was frequently flushed in those days, but not with any wine, save the wine of life; frequently thrilling, but seldom with the pulse of the flesh. For the stimulus to the higher gratifications only begins to fail when the sense of baffled powers beats back the soul to lower joys.

Yet there was a fierceness about this city life that appalled the country lad, fresh from the brotherliness of a small town. The continuously changing faces of millions to whom he was nothing, the hard self-centredness of everyone, gave him, at first, a sense of the black loneliness that pierces to the very marrow of the spirit. For a time it was even a relief to nod familiarly to an omnibus driver, to recognise a cabman, or a policeman on his beat, to know that, for a second at least, Ambrose Velly had emerged in somebody's mind as an individuality.

Then the black mood passed, for the city gave him a niche. Above all, she showed him what youth specially needs to learn, the line of least resistance for his efforts.

One night, a few weeks after his arrival in London, Ambrose entered a city church and sat down for a moment. For the miraculous had taken place, and fairyland had been realised on the solid earth. The whole profession was buzzing with the recent success of a young architect who had gained in open competition the prize for a design of a cathedral. Full of the spirit of "what man has done, man can do," Ambrose sat listening to the war-march that was booming from the organ, in the dim silence of the place, where the murmur of London sounded as dreamlike as the roar of the waves in a sea-shell.

"The music for strife," he thought, "and the building for rest—the two sides of art. For life is tidal; rest is followed by toil, war by peace, light by darkness." He almost fell asleep, till, as if a hand had ripped apart a curtain, he sat bolt upright, his pulses beating like muffled drums. For what he had been waiting for had come: the clear sight. In all its details, even to the changing lights that flickered hour by hour through the windows as the sun moved on its course, came the picture of the Gothic hall that a city company wanted built. From point to point he switched his mind, turning it like a searchlight from exterior to interior, from corner to window, from roof to lintels. Though he had no knowledge of it, the music led him on till, when it ceased, the electric thrill died down and he went out of the church, quickly calculating how many hours he could give to his design after the day's work at other men's plans was over. For the date at which the competition would close was not far off.

With a shudder he remembered the piano-practising girl next door, for on such small wheels do great wheels turn that a carpenter's hammer here below can shatter the clearest dream, the most solemn vision, as long as it is only enshrined in nerve fibre and grey matter. But in an hour Ambrose had sought fresh rooms, with nothing more nerve-shattering to be heard than the drip of a water-tap and the wails of the cats.

He was voted a morose fellow by his colleagues at the office; but they would have changed their minds had they heard the song of the fiddle late at night, when Ambrose played out the gratified vanity that capered in his heart at the sight of his brain-child on paper, whilst, as he wandered from *Cicely Sweet* to *Arscott of Tetcott*, the scheme of to-morrow's work came to his mind.

Then, at last, from his bedroom window he would glance at Orion's Belt, for that always carried him to Beckland and the life waiting at the gates. But Thyrza wrote gaily, and in the shining of the next spring's sun-rays there would be two creations—the child of brain and the child of body—called out of nothingness by the will of the universe that masquerades as man's will in the *Mystery Play* called life. Yet it was a good time for both husband and wife, this period of struggle and loneliness.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WINGS OF THE WIND

AT last there came at Beckland what Damaris always called the day of the great terror. About midday, across the clear December sky, there began to gather a strange darkness that grew, moment by moment, blacker and more pitchy, till the numbness of cold that came with it seemed almost due to mere absence of light. Borne on a north-wester, that soon shifted to north-east, tiny particles of ice, congealing too rapidly to form snowflakes, filled all the lower currents of air. Every ivy leaf on walls that faced the wind soon acquired a solid sheath of ice, and the window-panes between shone iridescent and opaque with the same steel covering. All through the day the wind was gathering slowly in speed, till it had reached the hurricane power that is usually only encountered in Atlantic storms.

In the pitch blackness of early evening Mrs. Velly heard a hurried knocking at her door. Opening it quickly, she found Damaris panting on the doorstep, after her struggle with the wind that was now flying past at a rate very near eighty miles an hour. The three houses were shuttered close against the violent raging that shrieked overhead, yet long, silted columns of ice had filtered through the eyelet holes of shutters and between the door-hinges. In the roar of the wind a shout a foot or two away was quite inaudible, and at first Mrs. Velly was barely able to distinguish the words that seemed torn away from Damaris's lips. Quickly, however, she pulled her visitor into the cottage and shut the door.

"There's trouble," she exclaimed. "I've felt it coming all this wisht day. Now, out with it. There's never any use in waiting."

"It's all my fault. I ought to have noticed before. I want you to come to Thyrza at once."

"Ah!" breathed the old woman, "I reckoned the storm would rouse the blood of her. That chimney will be down before the morning," she said, with a glance at the fire that was sending great puffs of smoke across the room. She was merely talking to allow Damaris's trembling lips to stiffen.

"I must get to Dr. Dayman, somehow," said Damaris. "Oh, why didn't I notice before? I almost think she's dying."

"Now," said Mrs. Velly, planting firm hands on the girl's shoulders, "you mustn't lose your nerve."

"But she's so ill."

"Ay, I'll warn she is. What I've got to say is this: we've got a pretty stiff fight before us, you and me. Now when you're in a tight place 'tis no mortal use saying, 'Oh, what I've got to bear,' or, 'Oh, will what I do be any good?' All you've got to say is, 'What's the next thing?'—and do it."

That "you and me" was unspeakably comforting to poor, inexperienced Damaris. All this time Mrs. Velly had been extinguishing the fire and throwing together a bundle of clothes.

"Now for it," she said, opening the door.

Outside a strange thing waited. For over the drifted snow that vaguely covered the familiar hedges there reigned utter stillness. It was so calm that the match Mrs. Velly lit to show the step just burnt down in her hand instead of being blown out. In the dim light the duck pond shone with the black greyness of ice that is edged with snow.

"Here, wait a bit," said Mrs. Velly, pausing to hammer at Josh Grylls' cottage; "he'd best come and sit with your father. Anyway, too, he can fetch and carry, and 'twill be safer for 'en in the farm than here, for 'tis a crazy sort of a roof he's got."

She felt like the captain of a beleaguered garrison on the eve of the siege.

"The storm seems to have died down," said Damaris joyfully.

"My God!" said Mrs. Velly, "don't you know what this lull means? 'Tis just that we'm in the very heart of it. 'Twill be upon us again worse than ever, afore long."

The calm, indeed, lasted a matter of thirteen minutes, but before the three were housed in the farm a howling gust had caught them that tore at the very foundations of the house. It took the combined strength of the three to force the door close, and when at last this was accomplished, the staircase opposite was covered with a sheet of slippery ice.

"You'll never do it," said Mrs. Velly. "You'll never get to the doctor to-night."

The two stood in the dark passage listening to the gusts that beat against the walls.

"Go upstairs and see," said Damaris, quietly twisting her shawl more firmly round her head.

She stood waiting for a few minutes, watched by the two old men from the door of the kitchen, till at last Mrs. Velly appeared at the top of the staircase, holding high a candlestick that guttered in the draught.

"Some one must go," she said curtly.

"I knew it," answered Damaris. "Only I can go. You must stay with her. No, no," she protested, as the old men interposed; "it's out of the question for either of you to go."

She was sick with a dull terror of the cruelty of nature that tore at the window-panes and racked the girl upstairs; but once outside the door, her strength rose to the need. Inch by inch she fought her way to the garden gate, there to cling to the bars for minutes that seemed hours.

The road was clean-swept in spots by the force of the gale, though with drifts against the hedges that by morning were six and seven feet deep. The danger, however, came neither from drifts nor cold, but from suffocation by the ice particles that tore against her, cutting the skin with myriads of steel points. Again and again, too, she had to force her way on hands and knees, always with the hideous consciousness that it was her own ignorance that was risking two lives.

Left alone in the kitchen the two old men sat close to the fire, listening to the wild voices outside that mercifully drowned all sounds from the room overhead. Mr. Westaway groaned once, laying his head on his hand, as he pictured his daughter's journey and realised his own helplessness. Old Grylls tried to comfort him.

"I tell 'ee what 'tis, maister," he said; "when us put seed to ground, us ha' got to trusten, and when us put corpse to clay, us ha' got to trusten. There's nort else for it."

"And in what, Grylls, especially when we put corpse to clay, as you call it?"

Even in the tension of this night a little excursion into the abstract was a relief to Mr. Westaway. Josh Grylls answered indirectly—

"This is the way I look at it myself," he said. "Us shouldn't have summer if so be spring didn't come first, nor winter without the fall. Same with life and death. Us have come out of darkness into light once, and 'tis true that us go again into darkness. Ay, but why shouldn't there be a light t'other side of that darkness? For 'tis allays that way; night and day, and night and day, light out of the darkness allays. And as us ha' seen light once, why not twice? Can 'ee go one better than that, sir?"

"I can't even go as far as that, Grylls," said Mr. Westaway sadly.

"Hark to the wind!" said Josh, holding up his hand.

The forces of death and destruction raged all round them, seeking entrance by any cranny. The farm seemed set in the midst of a sea of breakers, and great guns like battering rams roared against windows and doors. Every piece of timber in the structure was straining, every slate in the roof rattling. As each blast died away momentarily, they heard strange whistling sounds like death signals to an unseen sharpshooter. In a moment of comparative quiet, a rhythmic moaning came from overhead, broken only by Mrs. Velly's voice, or by the noise of coal being piled on the bedroom grate.

For everywhere, even in the zone of warmth before the fire, the cold crept death-like and numbing, as the floor coverings lifted under an icy draught that nothing could keep out, and the ice-shreds silted through the cracks.

"The drifts must be as high as the hedges by now," said Mr. Westaway.

"There's no way out of it, but to go straight on and to trusten," said Grylls; "if 'tis laid down for missie to get to Hartland, why, she'll get there, and if not, not. And fretting your gizzard won't make a pin's point of difference to the drifts, nor yet to the wind. And of that you may take your davy."

Mrs. Velly came bustling into the room for a second, pulling forward the great kettle and setting up a chair covered with flannels before the fire.

"See that they don't burn," she snapped.

"How is she?" asked Mr. Westaway.

"Mortal bad. 'Tis the storm that racks her worse than nature itself. She's always been like it when the sea's high, and what 'tis like to-night only God knows. 'Tis pretty nigh tearing the life out of her, anyway, with each wind that comes. My Lord, will any help ever win through to us to-night? The storm's bringing the cheeld, but—"

The gaunt woman's face was grey.

"'Tisn't nature," she said, as she disappeared upstairs, her loose slippers going flop, flop, all the way up the stairs.

"She's been such a merry little soul all through the summer," said Mr. Westaway, patting Danny softly, "and the child would have been such a joy to her. Just an hour's pleasure and then—that. You're an old man, an old wise man, perhaps I might say. What do you make of *that* now?" He pointed sorrowfully upstairs.

"'Tis a great big circle, maister," said old Grylls, holding out his arms with clasped hands; "round and round it goes, and when joy's greatest it comes nigh to agony, and when the agony's deathly, I believe there's a sort of joy in it. 'Tis all a circle where joy and pain run round and round, and one ends where t'other begins. 'Tis like an endless chain."

Slowly the hour passed, till at last Mr. Westaway started from his chair.

"Hark!" he said. "What's that?"

Above the storm there were surely voices, the blessed voices that bring help. Danny's hair rose on his neck. He flew to the door and began snuffing under it with joyful whines.

"Get out of the way, Danny; get out of the way, you fool," said old Grylls, struggling with the fastenings of the door. When at last he got it open a wall of whirling ice seemed to enter bodily with Dr. Dayman and Damaris.

"The sycamores are down," said she, sliding into the firelight, followed by the huge white figure of the doctor. They were both dripping into pools of white slush.

"Oh, how is she?" cried Damaris, hastily starting to strip Dr. Dayman of his layer of coats, as he fumbled numbly at a brandy-flask. "Quick," she said, almost shaking him, "go upstairs at once. Don't waste a second."

After a gulp of brandy, the doctor grunted. It was the first sound he had uttered since he entered the room. His great face flamed red and blue as the girl hovered round him, for he represented to her that divine thing called help. In the terror of cold and fear, as he had dragged Damaris with him, she almost prayed to the power of body and skill of knowledge that he carried with him.

"Steady," he said, "steady," as, leaning his arm on Grylls' shoulder, he kicked off his huge boots. "Ha!" he said, "that's better."

To Damaris there was something cruel in the deliberation with which he pulled out the toes of his blue knitted socks to see if they were damp, and stretched his toes like a gigantic baby. Yet there was intense comfort, as she sank on the floor in front of the fire, in the sound of the stairs as they creaked under his weight.

"Child," said Mr. Westaway, "you're wet to the skin. Go up and change, and then come down to some hot milk. See, we'll get it ready for you."

Old Grylls' trembling hands were already busied with a small saucepan he had discovered.

"Oh," cried Damaris, "I crept there on my hands and knees. What a fool I've been, but the storm took me by surprise."

"It needn't have, missie," said Josh, holding the saucepan over the fire. "I've tasted snow for days, and I've heard the tree branches snapping night after night."

"Then you might have warned me," said Damaris, dragging herself stiffly towards the door. "What's the use of knowing things if you keep them to yourself?"

"And how was I to know 'twould bring a cry-out to Mrs. Velly? But there, you can't teach a woman reason, no more than you can teach a tiger to lap milk."

Tempers were getting short under the strain of the night.

"My dear," interposed Mr. Westaway, "did you think of Ambrose?"

"They'll wire in the morning, if there are any wires standing by them. But anyway, they think the rails will be blocked by drifts for days. Oh, why didn't I foresee this?" she wailed again. "Father," she whispered, coming back to the fire, "it seems quiet above. What does it mean? We haven't killed her between us, have we?"

"My dear, everything that mortal could do, you have done."

But she was gone, slipping quietly upstairs to listen outside the room.

Standing there in the chill draught, it seemed that the future came behind her, touching her with stealthy fingers. Above the triangular staircase window there was a drift of snow through the crumbling wall, and, on the ledge, the cactus plant swayed in the wind. She stood with her hand on the handle of the door, afraid to move lest the balls of ice on her boot-heels should cause her to slip and make a noise.

It could not be death, for there came a muttered sentence from Dr. Dayman and the quick movements of a woman's footsteps across the room. Then Damaris sank on the floor of the landing, and to her exhausted senses it seemed that again she was fighting the blind wall of whirring whiteness. She was dumbly moving her lips by now, for she could feel Ambrose's reproachful look at her for having failed in her trust.

Yet, what did Ambrose matter? The sex hatred was uppermost now, in the memory of all the past months when the child had been left alone to face this night. All these months she had waited for the joy that perhaps would never be. It was not fair, protested Damaris to the forces of life; Thyrza had not received the wages of her trust.

At last, dumbly and prayerlessly, Damaris became aware of cries, very far off, very thin and strange, like a tiny gnat whistling in the sun-steeped air. All the glory of the past summer, the peace of golden heat, seemed in the sound, the far-off sound that meant life. Then there was a long wait, words and——

She drew breath sharply. For among the noises of this planet there was a new one, the wail with which life begins. Then Damaris crept away to her own room.

In the grey morning light she found Mrs. Velly standing by her bed with a steaming cup of tea. The woman's face was dry and inexpressibly worn. "Drink this," she said.

"Yes, she'll live, she'll live. 'Tis a great boy. Did 'ee send to Ambrose or not? You've borne more for'n than you ought to have been asked to bear. God forgive me for letting it be so!"

"Yes; I sent urgent word. But he'll maybe not get here for nobody knows how long."

"He's wanted here badly," said Mrs. Velly, fidgeting with the tea-cup she had placed on the dressing table. "Now, you'll stay in bed to-day, my dear, and get over last night."

"Stay in bed, Mrs. Velly?" laughed Damaris. "Oh!" she cried as she tried to move.

"Yes; you'll feel it worse than you thought for. You'll stay where you be, won't you, my dear? The doctor's staying till midday, and he shall give 'ee something against a chill."

"Why, you can't do it all! Whatever can you think of me, to imagine I'm going to leave you to cope with a mother and a baby, and a house and a father? Oh, I do want to see the baby. Is he lovely and big and strong?"

"Ay, he's a lusty chap," said Mrs. Velly uneasily.

"Mrs. Velly, what is it?" asked Damaris, coming up to the old woman. "You've been a tower of help in trouble."

"Eh, dear, and 'tis my own lad's lad."

"Mrs. Velly, what is it?" repeated Damaris.

"Oh, my dear," she said, beginning to wring her hands, "I don't know how to tell 'ee, and there's the doctor fuming below. He'll be up in two minutes, if I don't mind."

"See," she continued, putting her arm round the girl and leading her back to bed, "my dear, 'twas life and death that come last night."

"Thyrza?" whispered Damaris.

"No, no; Thyrza will do now. She's sleeping quietly. Look, my dear, look at the light," she said, pulling up the blind and pointing to the outer world. Then she opened the shutters and flung up the window till the room was flooded with the sunshine that sparkled from a sea of splendour. Treeless and measureless all the earth seemed now, for the hand of nature had blotted out the traces of man's boundaries. A soft wind, pure with the purity of a dream-heaven, fluttered Mrs. Velly's coarse white hair and smarted on her tear-rimmed eyes.

"Mrs. Velly, tell me, what is it?"

"My dear, death came last night. He must have gone soon after the baby came, they think."

"My father?"

"Yes. We found 'en, the doctor and I, sitting with his hand leaning on the book he'd been reading. I've got it open here. His hand lay on it."

It was a dream from which she would soon awake. It must be the snow sleep, thought Damaris, which she had feared last night. That was what the glare on her eyeballs meant.

Mrs. Velly drew from under her apron the open book and laid it on the table at the foot of the bed.

"You'll maybe like to see where it was open," she said.

"Mrs. Velly, it isn't true, is it?"

"My dear soul, you'm broad awake, and sorrow's broad awake, too. Look, there's the sunlight. The storm's done its work. Old Grylls left 'en about two o'clock, he says, with a great fire blazing. Then the doctor thinks he must have fallen asleep. And the creeping cold of the morning struck home. He'd a weak heart, Dr. Dayman says, and the trouble of the night and the cold touched 'en."

With the details came to Damaris the sense that there was truth in the words she seemed to be hearing.

"I want to be alone," she said at last.

Then she got up instantly and put up her hair in a knot. As she did so, her eyes fell on the book Mrs. Velly had laid on the table. It was the Bible, on the fly-leaf of which the Westaway births and deaths were recorded. Keeping her hand on the open page, she turned back to the place where the faded ink characters were traced. She saw her own name, and before that her father's. She would have to write the day of his death. Was it yesterday or to-day?

At that she realised. "There is no home now," she sobbed, "for he was home to me. This house is nothing but the strangest place." Then she turned to the pages in Ecclesiastes at which the book was open—the final summing up of human wisdom, of the flux and reflux of life. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever....The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

As she read, a kind of triumph filled her heart. For from the troubles of this life, at any rate, he was safe. Death passed, the gates of pain seemed closed.

They kept the death from Thyrza. But Damaris refused to see the girl a second time; she only realised her own loss fully as she watched the mother lying with her lips close to the baby head in its swathing flannels.

"A regular little Velly," said the grandmother, stretching out the wonderful bones of the tiny hand.

With a shiver Damaris turned away, and a perception of the truth suddenly struck Mrs. Velly.

"Ah," she said under her breath, "we'll win heaven easy, we women, once we're the t'other side, for we shall have paid the devil his due in pain this side of the river. 'Twill be *For Men only this way*, I'll warn, on the way down to the pit. Leastways, 'twill be so, if there's justice anywhere, for pay they don't, the men-folk don't, not in blood and tears as we do."

Half an hour later she was found carrying the child up the rungs of a step-ladder, for it behoved her to make sure that this latest scion of the Velly tree had his rights in life, and to carry an infant downstairs for the first time is to condemn him to ill-luck. So Ambrose II went up the step-ladder, wailing miserably at his weird experiences, combined with the pains of what Mrs. Velly biblically termed his hungry little belly.

When the wire at last reached Ambrose, for a moment he saw nothing but the colony at Beckland in the land where his heart lay. For somehow it seemed news, not so much of Thyrza and the babe, as of the homeland for which she stood.

Then he roused himself to look out trains and interview his Chief. At Bristol, as he had requested, there was a wire awaiting him, which told the tidings of Mr. Westaway's death.

It was a slow journey for the "roughed" horse along the road that skirts the coast from Bideford to Hartland, and night fell long before he could catch even a glimpse of the Promontory of Hercules. But at last, out of the gloom swung the lights of the point, first red, then white, and in the gleam of them came the memory of those first days when the Star of the West began to shine for him.

At last he stood between the two heaps of piled-up snow outside the door of Beckland, with the smoking horse breathing heavily in the damp air. As he waited, there came from within a child's cry and a woman's voice singing "Hush-a-bye, baby."

Strange new things were to be found on the other side of the closed door.

A few minutes later Thyrza crept into his arms with the thankful sob of one who has received a great gift. In the curve of his right arm she made him hold the child as she lay beside him.

"It's yours and mine," she whispered; "God gave him to us."

It was her creed; for this is what life teaches women like Thyrza. "And I won him with pain," she added.

After the funeral Dr. Dayman came back with Damaris to Beckland. He watched her anxiously, for her hands were clasping and unclasping tremulously.

"Now, what are you going to do?" he asked abruptly. "Sit down here, at once," he added, pushing forward a chair.

"I can't stay here any longer," she said. "I have no share in the life of it any longer."

"Damn him and her and it!" said the Doctor, jerking his thumb upstairs towards Thyrza's room, in a litany of objurgation.

Damaris laughed a laugh that ended in a sob.

"Stop that!" said Dr. Dayman sternly.

"And join you in your prayer?" she said, crumbling a biscuit for Danny; "it's like the Commination Service."

"Get out of the way, dog," roared the Doctor. "I can't bear any more of this; what with worrying about you I haven't had a relishable glass of wine or a comfortable snoose for a week. Now, look here, you're going to have a home with me. I've no chick nor cheeld, and you know I worship the ground you tread on. You shan't stay here another minute to have your loneliness thrust at you. Come here," he said, roughly pulling her up to his knees as though she were a child; "what you all see in that Velly I'm beggared if I know. Get down, dog." For Danny, considering his intentions sinister, was leaping up anxiously. "You'll come," he asked; "come home with me?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"But not to-night," he said; "you're not fit for it. Do you know what I'm going to do? Carry you over to old Mother Velly, plump you into her bed and make you sleep there. She's a comfortable soul, Velly though she be."

"But surely I can walk," said Damaris.

"No, you can't. By heavens, what you want now is somebody to pad the stones for you, and keep the winds of heaven from blowing too roughly on you."

Gathering her up he walked thus out of the house, to the amazement of Danny, the pigeons and the four ducks on the pond.

"Why did you never marry, Dr. Dayman?" asked Damaris, lying like a lamb in the crook of a shepherd's arm.

"Cœlebs sum et semper ero, madam," he cried.

"Here," he shouted to Mrs. Velly, "come down and hear what I've got to say!"

The old woman ran with pattering steps down the steep breakneck stairs.

"Got a chair-bed in the house?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered, laughing to Damaris, who, with Danny climbing on her lap, lay in the old chair before the fire.

"Well, then, you'll sleep in it to-night. This is a patient," he said, pointing to Damaris, "who has to be cared for as if she were melting snow."

The simile was suggested by the slush outside.

"She's to sleep in your bed. Got a nice patchwork quilt and a feather bed, hasn't it?"

Mrs. Velly nodded.

"Well, she wants feather beds and old cosy ways. That's why I brought her to you. Put her to bed at once, and give her a meal every two hours till night, when she's to sleep for ten hours. I'll send up champagne and game and fowls as soon as I get home, and I'll drive round for her to-morrow afternoon. You go and pack her clothes, for she is not to go inside that house again. And you mind what I say. She's not to set eyes on the Blessed Trinity over there any more."

So Damaris passed away from Beckland, and soon Josh Grylls was left in undivided possession of his hermitage; for, shortly after the child's birth, Mrs. Velly removed to Bideford to take up her abode with Thyrza and Ambrose. To Grylls it was as though a whirlwind of life had eddied round the duck pond and passed, and he found it strangely "wisht" to see no column of smoke from either house when he opened his door of a morning.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MASTER BUILDERS

AMBROSE VELLY stood for a moment with his latch-key inserted in the door of the little house in Bideford that he rented. Then he suddenly withdrew it and walked away up the street, for to-night he could not face the welcome that awaited him within, in the meagerly proportioned sitting-room, with its rickety second-hand furniture.

His work in London had long since been finished, and to-night the last episode of that hopeful time was over, in the letter which he had just received announcing the award of the competition. It struck him, at first, as comic that the judges should have so little knowledge of beauty as to have preferred another's design to his. For this was certainly the case; he had indubitably failed. Now, he only knew that a feverish desire to begin again possessed him, as a man who finds himself left behind in a race may put on a frantic spurt for a minute or two.

Instead of going home, he turned away to get a supper of stout and oysters and to think. In an hour's time he had let himself into the office again, and was back at his desk sketching a design for an Oratory, that rose before him as rapidly as a magic beanstalk. Yet it was feverish work and done at high pressure, so that, when he at length went home, his nerves were strained to breaking point. It was something like a toad squatting on an altar, he thought mockingly, for Ambrose Velly to be working at incensed aisles.

Somehow there was a root of bitterness in his life just now. In truth, Thyrza wore badly; not her love, for that was unchangeable, but Thyrza herself. For, although she could burn like a flame at the touch of the torch-bearing Eros, she never succeeded in keeping her hearth-fire bright. Energy she had in abundance, but unfortunately energy is not a force that can be turned in every direction like a hose pipe; your militant churchman would probably have browsed away his life in bovine placidity if fate had denied him an outlet in polemics. He would never have devoted it to science or philanthropy, as people imagine who talk of wasted energy, and although Thyrza had passion enough and devotion enough for fifty women, she wanted the strength of brain that would make her housewife and inspirer. The child, too, was often ailing, and after sleepless nights and toilsome days passed in one deep rut of domestic care, Thyrza found it hard to be gay, as Ambrose loved to see her, and although Mrs. Velly spent her time propping up the tottering edifice of married life, she was in herself too fiercely strenuous to diffuse an atmosphere of sunshine.

To-night Ambrose had scarcely shut the door behind him, when Thyrza flew to his side, on the noiseless ward slippers that she wore when waiting on the baby.

"Ambrose," she cried, "there's such trouble. Baby's very, very ill with bronchitis. Oh, I wanted you so, and you left me alone to-night of all nights."

It was the last blow of a day that seemed interminable, and Ambrose stood sullenly wordless.

"I don't believe you care," said Thyrza. They were the first bitter words she had ever uttered, and in the stillness of the firelit room they sounded with an awful distinctness in her ears.

He cared inexpressibly, yet in the weariness of the moment the little devilish thoughts that come to sensitive people told him what a pitiful drag a delicate child would be in a life of failure.

"Ah, forgive me. You love him, I know," said Thyrza. Then he held her hand for a moment and said, "May I go up?"

They stood by the child together, but both were conscious that a wall of separation was rising. And as Ambrose turned away to his room, Thyrza heard the key turn in the door. He wanted to get a night's rest, apart from the sorrow they ought to have shared together: he wanted her shut out.

Mrs. Velly had heard the sound too.

"A man's life can't be a woman's, child," she whispered, putting her hands on the wife's shoulders as they stood by the fire on which steamed a bronchitis kettle.

"It'll never be the same again, mother," said Thyrza quietly. "It's all changed since we've lived together."

Yet Ambrose lay staring into the darkness nearly all night, listening to every sound from the child's room, in a sullen disgust with himself for his weakness and with all that had been and all that was to come. In the morning Mrs. Velly gave him his breakfast, and he heard that the baby was a shade better. But Thyrza never appeared.

Yet in the days that followed he suffered far more than she, for the child's hard, tearing cough sounded in his ears perpetually. It went with him to the office and stayed with him all day, even during the hours when at night he set his teeth and went on with the plan of the Oratory. For nothing now, not all the devils in the world of the brain, could come between him and that design. Yet when Thyrza was out for the hour's airing that the doctor ordered, he would slip home whenever he could get away and walk up and down with the little tired creature resting in his arms.

Mrs. Velly tried to tell her daughter-in-law of this, but she was stopped by the look of dead misery on the girl's face. For all that Thyrza understood in life was slipping into the gulf, her husband's love and sympathy was already gone into the limbo of things that have been, and her child was passing through her loving hands.

At last the night came when Ambrose stood in the passage and listened to the strange silence that filled the well-like tunnel with its hideous mottled paper. The soaking rain had beaten into the passage through the sodden mat, and the gas-stove from the kitchen reeked. Yet his delicate artist senses noticed none of these things, for the stillness could mean but one thing—that the child who came on the wings of the wind was gone.

He went upstairs softly in his stockinged feet, and although he had sometimes felt that Ambrose II was a weight in the race that is to the swift, now he remembered nothing but the tiny fingers that had clasped his own big hands.

The door of the child's room was ajar, and as he stood outside he could see the mother bending over the baby's crib, the brightest thing in the house. In her white face, haggard with sorrow and fatigue, in the rough tangle of hair that clung to her neck, there was no loveliness, nothing of the girl who had danced for the joy of life. Yet on the strained features there was a wonderful light, the light that a woman's face wears when she looks in the face of life or of death, the two poles on which her existence turns. Ambrose took it to be Thyrza's farewell to the dearest thing she had ever possessed. But one thing, at any rate, he knew for certain, that the loveliness of it was almost divine, since no uncomeliness of body could touch it.

Thus at last did Ambrose meet that ultimate beauty of the spiritual that our race can only learn through sorrow, the thing that gives the last pathetic touch of loveliness to the earth's splendour that without it would be mere glitter.

Then Thyrza looked up and, seeing her husband, came out. Creeping downstairs again he followed her into the sitting-room.

"Is he gone?" asked Ambrose, his face working, so that even Thyrza understood.

At the sight the coldness of these miserable days broke up, and she cried—

"No, no; it's life. He's given back to us. The turn came this afternoon, and he's asleep and breathing quietly."

She could say no more, for Ambrose had caught her to him, in a renewal of the love that springs from trial.

"And," said Thyrza, "I hardened my heart against 'ee, when night after night, though he seemed dying, you'd go off. Oh, Ambrose, and I thought you didn't care for our little son."

They heard Mrs. Velly stealing upstairs to the child, and then Thyrza got up quickly and shut the door, lest the sound of their voices should be heard in the quiet room upstairs.

"I couldn't watch the little one go," said Ambrose. "I couldn't stay in the house. And, my dear, don't you know what I've been doing all these terrible nights?"

"No, Ambrose, no. I know nothing but his pain, his struggle for life."

"Working at that," said Ambrose, pointing to the rolls of designs he had laid on the table. "It must go by to-morrow's post, and even now it's got hours of work on it."

"Ambrose," she said suddenly, "if baby were dead to-night, should you finish it?"

She was in the mood when a woman drives herself on the edge of truth's bayonet. But he would not have it so, for laughing, he cried, "No, no; you're not born for tragedy, little Thyrza. If it wins, all our days of struggle are over."

But she understood, and for a moment hated the work that was more a part of him than the child his love had given her.

"I try to understand," she whispered, "but 'tis all outside me still."

Yet they held each other silently, in the memory of the great hours that had been for them. And a great thankfulness filled the ugly little room, such thankfulness as has filled, thank God, many an ugly little room before with the benediction of human patience.

"Come," said Thyrza at last, "you've work to do. You must have supper before you begin. But, oh, my dear, how woefully tired you are. Yet you can work with a good heart now."

"Do you know," he said, smiling, "that to-night I saw the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life? It was your face bending over the child, and I thought—it was good-bye."

"It was only good-bye to my hardness and blindness, dear heart," she whispered.

Then Thyrza did a hard thing, for she went upstairs to fetch Mrs. Velly to make the coffee that was to keep Ambrose awake till the work was finished. Yet she longed to do everything for "her man" to-night, in the sweet renewal of love. But Mrs. Velly could make it much better, and he must have the best of everything now.

Afterwards, through the hours of the night, Thyrza watched in the room above, while Ambrose bent over his plans in the sitting-room. He had often jested at things that men call noble, yet there was no unseemliness to-night in his absorption in this work, for its foundations had been laid in honest struggle and its pillars raised to the music of pain. And these things are realities.

The package went by the morning mail, and Thyrza, stealing down from the child soon after, found her husband asleep on the old draped couch. At the sight she posted off to the office and asked to see the senior partner. Mr. Trevithick rose at her entrance and put her quickly into his own chair, for he imagined that she had come to contradict the good news of yesterday.

"No, no," she said, seeing his alarm, "the boy's all right. But it's Ambrose. He's been working at his design all night and now he's asleep. So I came to tell you what had happened to him."

Trevithick laughed.

"Why," he said, "did you think I should birch him for miching? When he wakes, tell him I'll never let him inside this office again if he comes here to-day. But I didn't think he'd get the thing off in time." Then he added slowly, "It's a good piece of work, too."

Thyrza nodded wisely, but her heart leapt, for Mr. Trevithick seldom saw a fine thing anywhere.

"And now," said he in business-like tones, "tell me what the child may have. Give me a list, my dear."

And in her round, childish hand Thyrza wrote a list of luxuries for the baby. For through her, Mr. Trevithick indulged in one of the great pleasures of his life, the filling of Ambrose Minor's little nursery and little stomach with good things from all the corners of the earth.

In the sunny days when the child was convalescent, he would perch on the senior partner's cushiony shoulder and ride up and down the path by the south wall in the garden on the hill, while Mrs. Trevithick watched the pair from the drawing-room window, not, in truth, without a certain regret, for a woman's heart can beat inside very tight corsets indeed.

CHAPTER XX

THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

MRS. VELLY'S first impression was that she had been aroused from her sleep in the middle of the night. Yet on striking a match she found that it was only a few minutes to eleven. Then, as she heard the murmur of men's voices from the room below, she was suddenly wide awake and alert, as if at the call of some unknown danger. Opening her door quietly, she leant over the stair-rail to listen. From the front bedroom she could hear Thyrza hushing the whimpering baby in a tired, throaty voice, and in the sitting-room below Ambrose was talking to a stranger.

The smell of whisky that came up the narrow staircase was associated with so much that was terrible in Mrs. Velly's life that at first she felt as though the past had risen from its grave. For she was perfectly certain that she had heard the beating of the wings of trouble in the air. As she crept down the stairs, she saw a thin ray of light coming from under the closed door, through whose ill-fitting woodwork she could catch most of what was said.

"It'll be thousands of pounds in your pocket in time," said the sharp, rasping voice of a stranger, "and now that you're in charge of the new asylum that your firm's got in hand, you'll have a free hand in a matter like this."

Mrs. Velly's vague intuition of peril was changed now into certainty, for Ambrose must have had his reasons for keeping quiet about the fact that he had been appointed clerk of works to the new county asylum, one of the largest undertakings that Trevithick and Jerman had ever handled. She held her breath lest she should lose a word of what was said.

"Ten per cent," said Ambrose.

"On every order that you get for our firm, and it's as good as any stuff our rivals can offer you."

"Yet you're trying to square me," sneered Ambrose.

The man was silent, but Mrs. Velly saw him shrug his shoulders as clearly as though no door had intervened.

"You can make yourself a rich man by the stroke of a pen. That is, provided you don't put your head out of window to say you're not at home to good luck when it comes."

"I suppose you know it's a job that would strike me off the register as an architect?"

"If it got about, you mean. But that's not on the cards at all. And anyhow, I shall give you a call again shortly in a week or two."

The bird was limed, said the man to himself, as he swung himself out of the house; Mrs. Velly understood that perfectly. Neither of the men noticed her in the darkness of the stairs, for the hall light had been extinguished. Closing the front door Ambrose returned to the sitting-room, and Mrs. Velly heard his chair creak under his weight as he sat down. As she softly pushed open the unlatched door and entered, he started to his feet.

"Mother!" he exclaimed. "What on earth's the meaning of this?"

"Speak low," said Mrs. Velly, "for Thyrza's awake, and there's no need for her to know."

"For her to know what?" he asked angrily.

"I heard what that man said, heard everything," said Mrs. Velly.

"Well?" asked Ambrose sullenly.

"Do you know," asked Mrs. Velly fiercely, "what it means to a mother when she finds that her child is not as God made her, that her girl-child she bore is no maid?"

"I really don't think you could expect me to," he answered, with a savage laugh. "It's out of my province, you see."

"And what chastity is to a maid, honour is to a man," said Mrs. Velly quietly, "and the worst thing I heard to-night was your silence. What's the stuff they're trying to sell you?"

"Shoddy," he said curtly, turning on his heel to light his pipe. He was intensely angry at this interference.

"And that's what you'll let Trevithick put into the buildings he's answerable for!" exclaimed Mrs. Velly. "Ambrose, you must be mad. He's favoured you every way. and he couldn't be kinder to Thyrza and the child if they were his own flesh and blood. If it hadn't been for them, I don't believe you'd be where you are now in the firm."

"Do you know I'm sinking into a mere drudge?" he said bitterly. "If you heard all, you know that they've given me the asylum to put through; the sort of thing a journeyman builder might take in hand. Do you think Trevithick would keep me at work like that, on and on for ever, if he didn't count me an artistic failure?"

"That's unjust," exclaimed Mrs. Velly. "But if it's true, what's that got to do with common honesty. *Be* a drudge and an honest man, if it comes to that."

"Have you forgotten that even now, with all our cheeseparing life, there's still a debt left? Do you think I like this?" he exclaimed, pointing to the shabby room. "Do you think I like grudging Thyrza a new dress?"

"It's only to wait, Ambrose; only a short time now," she pleaded. "We've done wonders in reducing the debt that was left. And then there's this competition you worked at when the boy was ill."

"It'll be the same as the other," he said in a mood of black depression, "for it wasn't good work. Work! How can I work when every artistic impulse is being slowly strangled? I promised increase of power—and it's failed me. I'm slowly bleeding to death."

At last Mrs. Velly exclaimed suddenly—

"There's something behind all this. There must be. What is it, Ambrose? I won't leave this room till you tell me."

He turned round quickly and looked her in the face.

"Mother," he said, bending close to her, "do you remember what you said when father died? That I must win up?"

To Mrs. Velly the longing of years was bearing a bitter fruit of which she had never dreamt.

"I can do what you asked then," he said, "and do it at one blow. I'm going to buy Tonacombe and get back a fragment of the old Velly lands. It's dirt cheap, for the present owner's tired of waiting for a purchaser. Think, mother, out of this squalid struggle into—that!"

"Buy Tonacombe! Why, you couldn't even live there. What's to become then of your work?"

"But you and Thyrza could."

Mrs. Velly probed deeper into Ambrose's mind than he had gone himself, for it was his personal as well as his mental freedom that he wanted. His next words echoed her thought.

"I'm being stifled," he said. "My work's ruined without my liberty."

"And can any man," said Mrs. Velly bitterly, "expect to do fine work on the foundation of a lie? The walls you're going to put up will bury your talents ten times deeper than care could do. And what kind of Velly honour will you take back to the Velly lands, you who will have sunk far lower than ever your father did?"

With a gesture of despair Mrs. Velly left her son and went upstairs to her room; but instead of attempting to lie down again, she dressed herself neatly and methodically, even to her bonnet. Then, sitting still with her hands folded, she waited for the morning, while Ambrose let himself out of the house.

The lights of the embankment lamps glittered on the waves of the tidal river that lapped at the jetties, and the long avenue of trees stretched away along the river side. In the sucking sound of the water flowing in from the open sea to roar through the arches of Bideford bridge, there was a noise of the coming and going of active life. As he listened, Ambrose was revolted by the narrow limits in which the strife of the mind has to be waged. He longed for an escape into mental vacuity, envied the trawlers of Appledore and the coal-heavers of the barges moored alongside the quay, who slept now, forty fathoms deep in slumber, while he walked, a restless spirit condemned to the strife of the mind.

He had listened in a half-dream to the man's suggestions, dallying with the power they offered and shying mentally from the conditions on which it depended. Now his mother had forced him to face the other side of the medal and in the grip of this temptation the master-passion of his life came at last to the surface.

And the master-passion was his art; deeper than the land hunger, deeper than his love of love was the power of his worship of beauty. Of the triple fates, of which the Judgment of Paris is the everlasting symbol, it was she of the skilled hand who ruled. For he knew now that if the cunning of his brain and hand were to be injured by the miasma of a lie, then no glib-tongued agent of a cheating firm could ever buy him.

Yet, it was not true that a man's morals affected his work, else were all great artists saints. His Rabelaisian mockery of high things jeered, as he thought how far off the truth this was. Adultery, murder, false-swearing—all these to be found in artists' lives no doubt; Cellini was not the only thief, fornicator and assassin of the noble guild of beauty-builders.

Yet again, to his art not one true artist was ever false. They might lie in every other relation of life, but when the fiddler took up his bow, the painter his brush, and the poet his pen, then, as far as the vision of it had reached them, they told the truth.

And a building that was, in the very material of its structure, a lie, implied an architect who was a liar in his own art. From this verdict there was no escape. He paused, looking down to where the river broadened in its seaward course. To him it was a symbol of his thoughts that, widening into ever larger circles, embraced all the worlds of desire.

They carried him to Damaris Westaway at last, for it was she who had first shown him what the inspiration of beauty might be, and in the light of her ideal he knew how pinchbeck was the dignity of landed estates, or wealth, or any outward symbol whatever. Thus Ambrose judged between the goddesses who offer the kingdom of power or the kingdom of beauty. Yet there remained a third goddess, she that tests the heart-strings of a man, and comes in as many forms as the quivering rays of light that dance on the sea-foam, for which reason, doubtless, she was known of old as sea-born.

Mrs. Velly caught the six o'clock brake for Hartland, and by breakfast time was at Dr. Dayman's door enquiring for Miss Westaway. Damaris, coming downstairs to make the doctor's coffee, saw her speaking to the maid on the doorstep.

"No, no," cried the old woman, as the girl would have ushered her into the breakfast-room. "I want to see Miss Westaway alone."

After her sleepless night, the table sparkling in the sunshine with silver and china, made her eyes ache.

"Come in here," said Damaris, opening a door at the back of the house; "we shall be undisturbed here. But you must let me get you some breakfast."

Mrs. Velly feverishly drained the tea they brought her, but eating was impossible.

"I shouldn't have come if there wasn't mortal need of your help," she said; "and once before you forced my son to his duty."

"No; that's not the fact, Mrs. Velly. I only showed the way, and his own justice carried him along it."

"Yet it was you and your father," said Mrs. Velly vindictively, entirely forgetting her own anxiety that he should go; "it was you that sent him from Long Furlong."

"Yes," said Damaris gently, "it was."

"To where he found himself cheek by jowl with the whore of Babylon and all the gentry that bow down to Baal. For that's what it's come to now," said Mrs. Velly grimly. "He had a seed of weakness, and now it's sprung up to a tree in one night."

"Tell me."

"He'll bear and bear, till all of a moment his strength's gone. It's gone now. He says he'll have no woman meddling. But he must."

She sketched the story quickly while Damaris listened, white-lipped, as if at a nerve-shaking call for help.

"But, Mrs. Velly," she exclaimed, "think what you're asking. He would never forgive my interference."

"Go and wrestle with him," said Mrs. Velly, being of the land where devil hunts were common not so long ago, and where the evil eye is still dreaded in a furtive way.

"Oh, I know what I'm about," she continued. "There's no one on earth that is to him what you are. Away up above him, and yet down by the side of him all the same. I know, for that's just what I wasn't to the man that asked it of me in the days gone by. And none but the harlots know what it means to be a pure woman."

Damaris sat still, resting her head on her hand, while the old woman stood leaning over her.

"I cannot help," said Damaris at last. "I have nothing to do with it."

"Yes, you can. For he's more to you than any man has ever been. Oh, don't turn away. It's death-grips now, and I don't care what I say. They used to strip a poor soul for the burning. . . . I'm stripped now, and so shall you be. I say he's more to you than any other man. And he's got to be righted, as you righted 'en once before. You're a woman with iron in your blood and can bear the truth. And you know it's truth what I said about you; for you're not the sort that goes out in an east wind and swears it will make the lilies blow. Do you think I don't know why you kept his wife with you all those months? You never did that for any other maid, though you've helped a many. And she knew, too."

"But you, his mother, have failed. How could I succeed?"

"I'm no more to him than the paring of his nail, except that he feeds me and shelters me. What I eat matters to 'en. What I think, doesn't."

"And Thyrza?"

"Thyrza! Why, if he said to her, 'Jump, Thyrza, up into the noose and straight to Kingdom Come,' she'd just wind her arms round 'en and say, 'Kiss me first, Ambrose,' and then she'd jump. That's Thyrza. She can't shake herself free of him, no more than if he was in her bones."

"I have no power over him. No human being can do for him what you want me to do. Hasn't it been written, 'Let the filthy be filthy still'?"

"Only God can say that, and not the woman who loves a man. Ay, loves 'en better than her own happiness."

Damaris leant her head on her arms.

"I did it to 'en," whispered Mrs. Velly. "I did it. I gave 'en the weakness though I didn't know it then. For most women have their fancies when they'm quick. In some 'tis pancakes, and in others 'tis broad-figs or roast pig. With me 'twas nothing eatable, 'twas just strength. I wanted a strong man as soon as I was husband-high."

Damaris lifted her head and looked at the old woman.

"I wanted it above all in my child. But I didn't lay down what sort of strength 'twas to be, I reckon, and it come up cross-wise, upside down. And so he thinks land's strength, with the soul of a liar to till it. I've bred 'en wrong."

"What's bred can't be unbred."

"Then what's the good of living if we can't better what we was at birth; what's the good of living, I say?"

"I don't know," said Damaris bitterly; "I don't know at all what's the use of living. Nor does any one."

"I thought you did. I hated 'ee for it when you forced that girl on my son, but you knew your way well enough then."

"I'm dazed. I must think. Let me go. I want to be alone."

"Ay, the world's falling, same as it did round me. There's three women now, hanging on his yea or nay, although he doesn't know it. But you'll wrestle with 'en, won't you, my dear? My God, if I could only have 'en back safe at Long Furlong, if 'twas but to live on skim milk and potato parings!"

To a woman of Mrs. Velly's calibre there are no subtleties of offence, but the freedom of conscience gained by that fact is counterbalanced by the deeper damnation of the sins that are recognised. To her all prevarication was lying, all dinginess, dirt, all shady trade, plain theft. In the first frenzy of her knowledge of her son's weakness, she would have dragged the whole family into the depths of poverty again. For the idea of such treachery was overwhelming to Mrs. Velly, to whom the proper disposal of every hour of the day, and perfect honesty in butter weighing and egg counting had always been the ruling principle. A woman's philosophy seldom penetrates beyond her brain, it leaves her blood and nerves severely alone. Mrs. Velly was perfectly aware that she was not in any sense answerable for her son's acts, yet to her feeling they were one flesh, in a far deeper sense than could be true of man and wife.

"But," said she, with a slight return of cheerfulness, "please God, I'll have the smacking of little Ambrose. He shall grow up honest, if the smart on his little back can make him. But Thyrza would spoil the spirit of a buck-rat by coddling him, if she had the chance."

Damaris sat thinking for a long time, for she knew that an appeal to Ambrose was out of the question, since weak and futile action would be worse than useless. Mrs. Velly sat watching her steadily, till Damaris felt obliged to get up in order to avoid her glance.

"If you think you can help, you can," said Mrs. Velly at last, enunciating the true doctrine of power.

Yet for the man that Ambrose still might be, nay, for the man he actually was—to her, what was there that Damaris would not do?

In a flash of memory a picture came to her of a ploughed field with a blackbird in the hedge, caught fast with its leg in a gin and peering at her with pain-dimmed eyes. For fear of the shock to herself, she had passed on, leaving the creature in its agony. Yet all the night that followed, her thoughts had been with the poor bird bearing the mounting agony in its body to spare the woman's cowardly nerves. It was dead in the morning when she went to it, but the memory of her cowardice pained her still. She knew that the thought of her helplessness in these dire straits for Ambrose would be the bitterest thing she would have to look back on in after years.

Then there came the way to her mind, in a thought that flushed her face with excitement.

"Mrs. Velly," she said, "something that I can do has occurred to me. Something that will make it impossible for him to buy Tonacombe; and that idea ended, he will go on bearing his poverty and struggling as bravely as before."

If Mrs. Velly guessed what the way was, she made no sign, but waited with her eyes fixed on the other woman's face.

"But," she continued, "it may take some little time to do what I have in mind. And I cannot bear to think of being too late."

Scorching painfully as she spoke, Mrs. Velly exclaimed—

"But he can't do anything yet, I think. Not till the firm's agent is round again, and that may be weeks. No writing must pass, you see. I don't ask what you'll do, for I trust you; and all that there's best in my boy's life, I sometimes think, he owes to you. But you'll be as quick as you can, my dear?"

"I shall never forget what you said, Mrs. Velly," whispered Damaris, with the tears starting; "for often it's all that we women can do—to lay the foundations for the man we love. I will be quick. Only give me a day or two."

For there was no concealment possible between these two women, and if ever any proof were needed of Ambrose Velly's personal power it was to be found in the depth of devotion in the women who loved him.

When Mrs. Velly was gone, Damaris sat down deliberately to bear the pain that was mounting to her heart; for nothing on earth can be more bitter than the suspicion of weakness and meanness in those we love. It is, in truth, the one agony that no personal purity can soothe. Yet Damaris counted up the excuses for Ambrose, in the pitiful fashion of a woman who would shield a child from the whip, lying to herself now and again with the piteous loving lies that the angels themselves might envy.

But no woman can judge a man's acts as another man would, for she is either in love with the man judged or she is not. If she is in love, the love-light distorts everything, even at times to the exaggeration of his faults; if she is not, she sees everything through the shadow of her own ideal, far from the glare of the market-place in which he has to act. For a woman's moral judgment comes from her own emotional ideal of purity, whereas a man attains to his by the practical test of result. Hence her fall from her own standard is absolute, for the fragments of a broken ideal cannot be mended; whereas results are piebald horses, and often very much like one another when they reach the winning-post.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WINGS OF PEACE

UNDER the archway of the porter's lodge at Tonacombe Dr. Dayman and Damaris Westaway stood for a moment to enjoy the cloistered stillness of the small courtyard, set in grey walls where the ivy rustled with a multitude of sparrows. At first it was the only sound that the ear could distinguish, for the roar of the sea was deadened by the enclosing walls. Gradually, however, they could hear a droning note that hummed incessantly, now rising to a hollow boom, now falling to a sonorous whistle: it was the noise of a steam-thresher from where, on a distant hill, the year's harvest was being winnowed. Hour after hour of the day the note of the great engine continued, while even in cliff ravines, faintly perceptible above the roar of pebbles and the hiss of spray, the throb of the winnowing-fan sounded its undertone.

The next moment the arrival of the visitors was discovered, and there came a rush of barking dogs round the corner of the "street." The farmer who occupied the rear portion of the building, once merely the kitchens of the manor-house, was to show the place.

"Ay," said he, eyeing the cloudless sky with a cynical glance, "it's a foxy day, this, that'll bring rain or snow before long. Sun like this isn't natural to the time of year."

"Pack o' nonsense, Vosper," said Dr. Dayman, as they followed the man into the hall; "it's a ribbon day for me, for it isn't often that I go gallivanting for a whole day like this."

Dr. Dayman had now a partner, and it had not proved a very hard matter for Damaris to persuade him to drive her over to see the old place.

On the hearth a log-fire sent out the smell of oozing sap and the deep walls shut off the noise of the winnowing-fan. Tables and chairs of old oak still stood in the hall and one ray of sunlight threw bright discs of colour high up above the fireplace.

"We're obliged to light a fire here winter-times. Everything smells dampish else," said the farmer.

Through the lozenged windows of the panelled drawing-room Damaris caught a glimpse of the sunlight on the smooth turf. In the rays of it she could almost see the stately ladies in hoops and farthingales who had, in the long chain of life, given the blessing of Ambrose Velly to a grateful world. Passing through the room she leant for a moment on the sill, looking out at the walled Pleasaunce, where a black cat sat engaged with the cares of the toilet. Outside on the cliffs the breakers were roaring, yet here sat puss holding up a paw while, with the talons extended like fingers, she pulled out the pads with her white teeth, thus applying sharp massage to these dainty members. In the intervals of labour she gazed with eyes of butter-cup yellow at the sunshine that shone on the winged eagles of the gateway. She was, thought Damaris, in the complacency of her grace, the very image of Thyrza.

Upstairs Damaris stood for a long while by the arrow-slit, or solar-window, in the wall of the large panelled bedroom. Through this she could see straight into the hall, where Dr. Dayman stood talking with the farmer. It was late in the week, and Mr. Vosper's shaving-day was a Saturday, hence his cheeks, when he laughed, ran into furrows of greyish stubble.

In the white purity of the light from the traceried windows the memories of bygone lives seemed shining into a fastness of the olden world, far remote from the roar of the present. With a pang, Damaris remembered the mean little house that Ambrose inhabited in Bideford; for the last time she visited the town she had seized the opportunity to walk down his street. The second room that opened on the Queen Anne staircase should, she thought, have been the nursery. Yet it was over-dark for a child, who would want a gay room with a nursery paper on the walls, covered with baby pictures of lambs and other delights. Damaris knew quite well how one would carry a child round the room to look at them, cuddling his toes in one hand as one did so.

When she went downstairs she found a meal of bread and cheese laid for them, with a tea-tray for herself. The doctor was holding up a bottle to the light.

"Look at this," he cried, as Damaris appeared.

It was a "seal" bottle, with the inscription, "Rev. R. S. Hawker. Morwenstow, 1837."

"This was made by Passon Hawker," said Dr. Dayman, "to commemorate the accession of Queen Victoria. The cordial, I'll warn, is made from sloes grown at Stanbury Lane, and Plymouth gin, the "Monk" brand. Taste it, Princess," he said, smacking his lips amorously as the fine scent rose from the glasses. "Do you know, Vosper, that Plymouth gin is the chief ingredient in all the best cocktails made in America?"

"All I know is," said the farmer, "that us found half a dozen bottles in the cellar, of cowslip wine, and such old trade; but beer's more to my taste."

"What sort of land is it, Vosper?" said he.

"Well, the pasture's fair and dry, and there's not much fear of caud in the liver for the sheep. And as for the house, the dairy might be worse. Winter-times you want all the mow-stones you can get to keep the ricks covered, and there's more murs and gulls than folks, and not so much as a pannier-market nearer than Bude. But there's worse places than Morwenstow."

"'Tis just the place for gobby (weird) tales," said the doctor, who always used far more dialect than the natives.

"There's a headless dog that walks down 'the street,'" grinned Vosper. "And a hand, they say, unhapses the door to the bottom of the staircase. 'Tis well," said he, enjoying Damaris's shivers, "that we'm living when we be, and not when my grandmother was a cheeld. For then, all up the woods the yeth (hell) hounds would be baying. And what's worse, 'They' was above ground by troops. Seen 'em by the score, hundreds of times, so her used to say."

Damaris felt herself passing back into the shadows of the grey world.

"Who were 'They'?" she asked.

"Why, the dead folks, ma'am. But folks know what to do now."

"What in the world do you mean?" asked Dr. Dayman, thinking how Mr. Westaway would have seized note-book and pencil.

"Why, back along, with the words 'dust to dust and ashes to ashes,' they never threw so much as a handful of earth on the coffin. But now the grave-digger always chucks in a clod or two and it keeps 'em down. But that was never done when my grandmother was a cheeld, and so the dead come back then without so much as a by-your-leave. But what's a ghost or two, or a headless dog, here and there?" said he, in a generous spirit. "They mostly pass 'ee by."

"Capital place for smuggling," said the doctor.

"There's an underground way to the smuggler's cave on Greenway, the private bay of the estate," said Damaris, and up every chimney there's a hiding place. Between the Blue Room and the drawing room there's a money-hoard, a sort of funnel between the two walls, and up in the roof of Michael's room there's a secret chamber."

The doctor looked curiously at her, for she seemed as familiar with Tonacombe as with the Prust manor-house, and yet she had never seen it before, as far as he knew.

"Ay, 'tis a proper old cubby-house of deceits," said Vosper, "and there's been witches in the parish and that not so long ago. But, there, 'tis easy dealing with they gentry. If they hags 'ee in the night, just you go out and drive a nail in the ground, and the next person that comes limping to the house is the witch. To keep 'em out o' nights, drive a knife into the key-hole, for that spits 'em. But I reckon 'tis time for me to leave 'ee to your dinner."

"I'll warn," said the doctor, as Damaris lifted the teapot, "that they still sow seed from a zellip here, as they used to when I was a boy. That's the old seed-lip, you know, used before the drill came in."

He was as gay as a boy, as they ate and drank, with the place getting more shadowy every minute outside the circle of the fire, which they fed from a box of copse-cuttings that stood by the hearth.

"Now," said he, drawing a paper from his pocket, "I want your careful consideration of this. I went up to the Devonshire dinner last year, and they gave us Devonshire cream and junket."

"Well, why not?" laughed Damaris.

"Why not, saith she. Why, because one swallow doesn't make a summer, and that's all we had that *was* Devonshire. Just you listen to this. Tell me how it strikes you."

Spectacles on nose he went solemnly through the menu, marking the courses with a beat of his great forefinger.

Chives Soup
Tea-kettle Broth

Whitebait from the mouth of the Exe
Clovelly Herrings

Squab Pie
Leekie Pie

Venison from Exmoor
Saddle of Exmoor Mutton and Laver Sauce

Pig's Chitterlings
Hog's Pudding

Mazzard Tart and Clotted Cream
Whortleberry Tart and Clotted Cream
Junket

Coffee
Metheglin
Plymouth Gin

"Now," said he, looking over his glasses at her, "do you know what I'm going to do with that?"

"Use it for your next dinner party," said Damaris maliciously, for she knew the Doctor's weakness for economy.

"No, madam," he shouted, "I'm going to send it to the secretary of the Devonshire dinner, and if he uses it I'll come up to dine with 'em, and if he doesn't I won't. And I suppose you call that cheek?" he chuckled.

"Something rather like it," acquiesced Damaris. "But you're both loyal sons of Devon, so I expect he'll love you the better for it."

"Your hand's bleeding," said he, glancing at Damaris as she ate jam piled on the top of her cream.

He caught her there, for with all her knowledge of the dialect, she did not know the phrase that signifies jam and cream together.

"And you, doctor, have got an eye too big for your belly," said she, using the homespun expression that means an over-large helping. She was trying to summon up courage for an avowal.

"Doctor," she asked at last, "do you know why I brought you here to-day? I know you thought it was because I wanted an outing. But there was a more serious reason. Who do you think is the owner of these wild acres and this old house?"

"A fellow called Kempthorne, you said. Not that it's of any importance, since I don't want to buy it."

"You can't, unless you buy it from me. For I, *moi qui vous parle*, am the owner of so much ling, heather, gorse, and cliff."

"Now, what ridiculous rigs have you been up to?" said he crossly.

"Do you remember that you once guessed a secret of mine?" she said in a low voice.

"I thought you'd forgotten the fellow."

"In one sense, I have. He's very far away from me, now, and yet very near. I may perhaps never see him again, but I hope to see his work. You didn't think women ever cared for a man's work, even more than for the man, I suppose. But they do sometimes."

"I'm sitting on thorns, Damaris," said Dr. Dayman plaintively, "till I know whether you are delirious or not."

Damaris laughed.

"Ambrose Velly," she said, "has had a sore battle with himself and with things. And the things seemed likely to get the better of him. Mrs. Velly came to me last week in great trouble, for this place was a temptation to him. He was tempted to sharp practice in order that he might buy it."

She walked away to the window, while the doctor watched her anxiously.

"All his life," she continued, coming back to the fire after a silence, "all his life his mother has dinned into his ears that he must retrieve the family fortunes. Then there came the means of buying Tonacombe, if he would but juggle a little with his honesty."

"And so you bought it over his head to save him," said the doctor.

"There was no other way that I could think of," she said.

"Will he like your doing it, Damaris?" asked the doctor.

"I cannot tell; but, somehow, I think he will understand. For in mind we're very near to one another. And when that's the case, one can know everything without giving pain by the knowledge."

"And he is all that to you?" said the doctor.

"Oh, I don't grieve, I only want to see him what he might be."

"And so you give away your living. For on what are you going to live, if you've sunk all your capital in this place?"

Unknown to Damaris, the doctor's avarice was at bay in him, for he saw a way to retrieve her error, though he was averse to sacrificing himself.

"Do you remember, doctor, that years ago, whenever I picked up a new dialect word, you used to say, 'Put 'un in, my dear,' to the book I was to write? Well, I've written that book and sold it. I've got the tip of my pen in the world's oyster. It's called *A Man of Genius*."

"Oh," cried he, with a shout, "so that's the way the cat jumps, is it? Where will you get your next hero from?" he added mischievously. "For this, I fancy, might have been called *A Man of Devon*."

"That's been used," said Damaris with a blush.

"You know, my dear," he chuckled, "a woman of letters has to have a new lover for every new book. But," he said, following her out of the house, "if you're going to live here, what's to become of me?"

"Will you come, too, Dr. Dayman? I don't think you can get along now without me. And you shall have a regular hospital to look after, for I mean to get city waifs down for the sea to nurse."

Dr. Dayman had a theory that the sea, who ages ago bore in her womb the seeds of both animal and human life, is the elemental mother who can most quickly thrill the weakly children of the race with vital force. Damaris knew that he would thoroughly enjoy himself as the presiding genius of her sea nursery.

But the doctor was shaking an apple tree in the garden, and in a few minutes he came back to her with a handful of the plump and red-streaked "sweet broadeyes" that carry in their juicy flesh more of the pungent savour of the earth than anything else that grows, save perhaps the Cornish gillyflower and the hay-scented fern of the Devon hedges.

"This place'll suit me uncommon," he said; "but it won't belong to you much longer, for I'm going to buy it of you. And you and the brats can come and lodge with me. I'll adopt 'em all. It's high time I shut up shop."

Damaris understood; he had, as Ambrose would have said, wrung the neck of the old man's peculiar complaint, hatred of expenditure.

Over the hills, as the two set out to explore, gleamed a clear sky. Only "the cloud of the day" lay in a great bank over the sea horizon, while all the land was luminous with the shimmer of sunshine on woods and ploughland.

Along the valley, below the church of St. Morwenna, the bed of the stream was marked by a line of trees, purple with unburst buds above the hart's-tongue fern. Higher on the hillside, branches festooned in lichen shaded the tawny bracken with delicate shapes in grey gossamer. One side of the valley lay in deep shadow, and on the sunny side was reflected the outline of the church. In the stillness of the transforming light it seemed like the shadow of a man's hand laid on the rough-hewn breast of nature.

"Down there," said Dr. Dayman, pointing to the rocks below Hennacliff, "Hawker's men used to pick up the gobbets of flesh from the drowned men. That was reality; this," he said, pointing to the church and its shadow, "is dream."

"Then," said she quietly, "we'll just go on dreaming."

"Men will," he answered softly, "as long as women love as you do, Princess."

It was bedtime in the farmyard when they left. For at sunset from the darkening fields the cows were filing in for their long winter's night rest, which often lasts from five o'clock in the evening to eleven next morning. There they stood in patient groups, with tightly curled flanks and soft, slow gaze, filling the yard with the sweetness of their breath, while they waited for the shippen doors to be opened. On the topmost branches of the trees the sunset glow still lingered, and from the cliffs came the quiet breathing of the sea.

Over in Bideford Mrs. Velly was hurrying to the office of Trevithick and Jerman with Damaris Westaway's letter in her pocket. She found Ambrose sitting at work in his private room, and at the first sight of her white lips and trembling hands he imagined that she was the bearer of bad news.

"What is it, mother?" he asked, putting her gently into a chair.

"It's that night when I heard you talking," she said.

They had never mentioned the subject since her return from Hartland, and Ambrose had never even asked where she spent that day.

"I want you to read that," he said, handing her an open typed sheet and watching her intently. There came back to him the moment when he had gone down over the cliff at Smoothlands, for the sweetness of a similar triumph was here.

At first there was a mist before Mrs. Velly's eyes, but at last she saw that it was a commission to a firm of contractors to supply the interior wooden fittings of the asylum. So Damaris had sacrificed herself in vain, she said bitterly.

She swayed slightly in the agony of the moment, till her son steadied her with his arm.

"That's not the firm that tried to buy me," he said gently. "This"—he struck the paper—"is my answer to them."

In the next room there were short, sharp answers and replies, and from the street came the wheezy groan of a barrel-organ, but Mrs. Velly heard only the rustling wings of peace.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COSMIC DANCE

AT last there came to Thyrza the moment of which Damaris Westaway had warned her long ago at Bradworthy, the moment when she knew herself the wife of a great man, and felt her little bark launched for the open waters that she dreaded. The morning light shone clear on them all as they sat round the breakfast-table; the child in his high chair was drumming on the table for his porridge, and Mrs. Velly leant forward, holding the teapot poised in her hand. Before she put it down the world had changed for them all; Ambrose held in his hand the open letter which announced that he would be the architect of the Oratory, for the design sent in at the time of bitter struggle had been better work than he realised.

Suddenly, her eyes filling with tears, Thyrza got up hurriedly and left the room, for the small house where they had lived so meagrely seemed a paradise whose gates were now closing behind her. Yet she could not bear to cloud the radiance of his rapt face, white and tense with excitement. But he had followed her upstairs.

"Thyrza," he cried, "Thyrza, did you hear? It's come, the great moment. Oh, my wife, aren't you glad?"

With a cry she turned towards him.

"Child, what is it?" he exclaimed, as he felt her shudder.

"You're going away," she said, "where I can't follow you. I dread it so—the big world that's calling you. Long ago she said I should disgrace you."

"She? Who?"

"Miss Westaway."

"Why, that's queer," he said, "I forgot it in the excitement of this. But by this same post there came an invitation for you and me to go to Tonacombe for a few days. And, by Jove, we will, too. I wouldn't have gone under other circumstances, but this," he struck the letter he carried, "changes everything. I don't fear even the charm of Tonacombe, with a success like this at the back of me."

"That's the beginning," said Thyrza coldly, drawing away from him. "You'll go to Tonacombe and then you'll go to other places where you'll be ashamed of me. I shall soon be nothing to you. I shall demean you, for I don't even know how to dress right. I can only love you."

"Aren't you glad for me?" he asked, his face falling. "When I opened the letter, I swear I thought of your joy before my own. Why, there's mother below chanting the Nunc Dimittis. Thyrza, what the deuce is the matter with you?"

"I'm only fit to be the wife of a plain man," she said bitterly. "She, over there, will be able to talk to you about your work. I can see her now, while I look on at her talking to you, using words I couldn't even say. Oh, my heavens, how can I live? How can I live?"

"Thyrza, is it all forgotten? That night when the boy nearly died? Do you think I—or you—will ever get beyond that night?"

"But for him," she said, raising her head from the mantelpiece on which she had hidden her face—"but for him, you would never have married me. It never ought to have been."

The next moment, as Ambrose turned on his heel and left the room, she would have given the world, only to recall her unwise words. Yet all the morning the absurd trifles of the future filled her fancy; as she carried her basket to the market for butter and eggs and vegetables, she wondered whether in the new life she would be obliged merely to give orders. All the delights of cheapening here, and saving a penny there, would be over for ever.

At last Thyrza caught sight of Chrissie Rosevear in a crowd of chattering countrywomen, who were making up for the social starvation of their normal days by a bout of gossip over great market baskets filled with pallid fowls and disembowelled geese.

"Oh, Chrissie!" she exclaimed, "what years and years it seems since I saw you."

Laughing and buxom, Chrissie panted along by Thyrza's side, till they reached a quiet side street.

"Well, how's the world been serving you, Thyrza?" she asked. "I've had a mind to come and see 'ee several times market days, but I didn't know whether you'd want to see me."

"We shan't be here long, Chrissie, for Ambrose has won a prize in competition. I dread it so, for I shan't know my bearings among grand folks."

"I shouldn't fret my gizzard about that if I was you," said Chrissie. "Folks is folks, and pretty much alike, too, whether up or down."

"But you don't know, Chrissie, what 'twill be like. He'll look at me and wonder if I'm looking right, and I shall be afraid to open my lips with 'en."

"My dear soul, I shouldn't care if I was in my shift, if so be as it suited me to wear it. And if my ways didn't suit 'en, why, 'twas for better, for worse, and that I'd soon let 'en know."

"I can't hold 'en, Chrissie. There's days and days he never knows whether I'm there or not. I stood behind 'en the other day, and he never knew I was waiting for 'en to look up. My word, I could have took up the paper and torn it right across. I tell you, I'd hard work to keep my hands off it. For I'm naught to 'en the side of an old plan."

Her face worked furiously, and Chrissie waited till she was quieter.

"Every woman goes through with that, sooner or later," she said quietly. "Do 'ee think I wake John up o' nights to say, 'John, do 'ee love me still'? Good Lord, he'd think I was mazed. It can't be same as 'twas first go off, my dear, but over the cheeld you'll meet."

"We did, we did," cried Thyrza.

"And he trusts 'ee, he respects 'ee. And that wears better than the 'Come-kiss-me-quick.'"

"He's never forgotten," said Thyrza in a low voice, "though he doesn't know that he remembers it. He's never forgotten how the child was got. There's only one man who respects me—and he doesn't know."

"Who's that?" asked Mrs. Rosevear sharply.

"John Darracott, the other man that cared for me. I never see 'en now; for all I've heard tell he is still in Appledore at the gravel-loading."

"Ay," said Chrissie, "that is a man, if you like. When he spoke out about the job down to Quay and told the truth at last, my John said to me, 'Chrissie, that's heart of oak, if you like.' And it takes a sharp pin to make John Rosevear jump."

Thyrza took it as a depreciation of her husband: she was up in arms in a moment. "Why, yes," she said, "Darracott's an honest man enough, but Ambrose is a clever one."

To Thyrza, Ambrose was always "clever," for she never knew what clever meant to the day of her death, to which lack of perception many of her troubles may be assigned.

"And," she continued, "I'd give my heart's blood for him any day."

"Good land, child," cried Chrissie crossly, "and what good would that do 'en? A penn'ith of common sense would be worth all the blood in your body to 'en." She departed, shaking her head forebodingly over the future developments of the Velly history.

The finest stimulus to the brain-worker is success, and now to-night, as Ambrose sat at work on a last design for Trevithick and Jerman, every nerve was thrilling with power. A plank creaked overhead as he sat over his drawing-board in the sitting-room, but he was dead to the outside world in the concentration of the moment. In front of him he saw the tower of a church, set in the midst of billowy breasts of hills, and poised on the side of one, like a ship that rides downwards into the trough of a wave. He was studying the details of his scheme, like a musician at work on a fugue; for nowadays so much has the element of passion invaded the arts, that only in architecture and fugue writing is the intellectual side uppermost.

In the room above him, Thyrza was kneeling by the crib of Ambrose II. Pressing her lips to his flower-cheek, she prayed to the unseen disposer of fate.

"Ah, give him back to me. Give him back to me, for he's wandering far away from me now. Let me hold 'en a little longer yet. Only a little longer."

Then, like a gambler risking all on the cast of the dice, she drew from the wardrobe the only beautiful dress she had, a gown of filmy black. Standing in front of the glass with it on, she watched the sequins on it running together into molten streams with every movement of her body, while she gazed at the grace of her figure, the suppleness of her skin, with the confidence of a swordsman who handles a trusty blade, or passes his glance along the walls of a well-equipped armoury.

Outside the house, the guard-lights on the coast flashed their message of warning to the passing vessels; the stars pulsed and paled, and in the murmur of the wind sounded the whirring undertone of the world's loom. But in the pin-point focus of her own longing the outer world was non-existent. All her life passed before her eyes, as before a drowning man: the height she had reached with Darracott on the last night she had ever spoken to him, the depth she had touched in the fatal hour when she failed Ambrose.

Still moving the sequins, she faced the two—the call of the spirit, the call of the body. The same woman had answered each—but not in the same man. The ties of mind had never linked her to her husband, and the tie of the body was going. To Ambrose her beauty, coarsened, maybe, by a hard life, but still there, was among the things that are old. For a man can only be held by the seduction of change; he, not woman, being the truly mutable.

Yet what was it that Ambrose had once said? The most beautiful thing he had ever seen—herself, pale, worn, a tired drudge, leaning over a baby's cot. Suddenly the sequin dress had become the robe of shame; she stripped it off and stole downstairs in her old brown frock.

Hour after hour she sat by the fire watching Ambrose. Mrs. Velly looked in once or twice, but only to be motioned away by Thyrza. The house became very still, for the old woman, tired of waiting, had gone up to bed.

At last Ambrose threw down his pencil and, turning in his chair, stretched himself in the blissful relaxation that follows labour.

"Why, Thyrza, I made sure you were in bed long ago."

"I love to sit and watch you," she said quietly.

"Ah, child, 'tis a wonderful, wonderful world," he cried, "and the wonder of it only grows greater with the years."

He stood leaning with his shoulders against the mantelpiece, looking not at the homely room, but at the splendour of the future. "The glory of the setting sun, the music that soars beyond our dreams, the palaces that rise in vision, the great words that ring. And somebody called it 'a sorry scheme.' Good Lord, what a fool that man must have been! It's a wonderful thing to be alive, in any of the worlds there are for a man. Which of them do you live in, Thyrza?" he asked, suddenly smitten with the sense of her spiritual poverty.

It hurt him, as it hurts a man to see his beloved go barefoot and ragged.

"In you," she said, looking up at him, "the greatest thing in the world to me is just you—and yours. It always will be so, Ambrose. I'm sorry I grudged you your good fortune. 'Twas only a part of me that did. For there's nothing I wouldn't give up for you, really."

In truth, the hidden purpose of this life can be none other than to learn the secret of the great rejections of the world, as when a man sacrifices ease to unlock the gates of knowledge, or refuses bliss to serve the higher purpose of the ages, at which, as yet, he can only dimly guess. Compared with the great arc-lights of such sacrifices as these, Thyrza's small act of self-conquest was but a rushlight that feebly flickers in the darkness of a great room. Yet a rushlight may serve to mark a pathway.

Then Ambrose drew his bow across the strings of his fiddle, and in the war-march that he played they both heard the wonder of the fight: the hardly contested inches in the upward strife, the bitter corners where the wind blows cold in the zig-zag passage to the heights.

At last he softly touched the strings to the tune of "The

Wind among the Barley," and as softly, to his jigging, her tears fell.

"Dance, Thyrza," he whispered with a smile; but she shook her head, for the girl who had danced at Long Furlong was dead. The Ambrose of those old days was dead too, and on his face the lines were gathering—the fine lines that mark the patient worker's face, the human carving in which is written the finest record of our strange race that fronts the sunlight of the divine, even though its feet be in mire.

Yet the dancing was not missed entirely, for presently Mrs. Velly appeared, carrying in her arms a bed-gowned figure, whose bright eyes blinked at the lights in the room.

"Here's a rascal," she said. "Look at his eyes, like diamonds. There's no sleep in *them*. I hear," continued Mrs. Velly, on whom science seemed to be dawning as once it shone on the Copernican age, "I hear that they tell up some old tale now about our all going round with the earth. Why, they might have learnt that from the babies long ago; for when they've got the ache in their little insides, 'tis round and round you've got to go with 'em. And when 'tisn't ache, 'tis up and down and up and down, and way to go, and dance on little toes. That's the old earth going round inside 'en, I reckon."

"That's your version of the cosmic dance, mother," said Ambrose, as she set the baby on the rug in front of the fire. "Well, I've heard worse ones than that, too."

Then he drew his bow and played a little trill, high up, like the fluting of a gigantic gnat; to the sound of it the merry pink toes moved solemnly up and down, and the nut-brown head swayed gleesomely above the tumbled bed-gown, which Mrs. Velly held by the tail. Every now and then a little laugh rippled out for the joy of the dancing blood in him.

" 'Tis most as warming as a drink of home-made peppermint-water to look at that," cried Mrs. Velly; "but, my dear days, what a time for the blessed to be up!"

But she had not the heart to stop the clumsy little shuffle of the feet, in which the purpose of the ages was fulfilled.

"Thyrza," said Ambrose, "never regret anything. For life is wonderful—in its dawning, in its ending, and in the hard time between."

To them both even the darker memories were illumined by the unknown purpose that unfolds itself in flesh and spirit alike. But Thyrza was glad that the sequin dress hung still in the wardrobe.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE WAY OF LOVE

"BUT," said Ambrose, "you always did look at everything *sub specie aeternitatis*."

The strange words arrested Thyrza's attention. She was playing backgammon with Dr. Dayman in the hall at Tonacombe, while on the opposite side of the fireplace Damaris sat talking to Ambrose.

"I remember long ago," he continued, "how I used to toil behind your idealism."

"It was my father's trick, I suppose," answered Damaris, "I must have caught of him. Mere breathing was never enough for me, for I always want to wring the best out of life, and that can only be done by giving *my* very best. But Ambrosian life is a different matter, no doubt," she added, with a laugh.

Thyrza watched her slim form, lying back in an old carved chair, with her long hands resting on the arms of it. She felt herself to be a thick-set farm-wench.

"May I read the book in proof?" asked Ambrose.

"It's too intimate," said Damaris; "you could not read it without recognizing the source of many things in it."

"But if the world reads, surely I may," he answered, looking down at her bent head.

"That's the worst of the pen," said Damaris, "it runs away with one's secrets."

"The mason's trowel doesn't, thank heaven," answered he, with a laugh of pleasure at the mere interchange of thought. Thyrza's heart ached at the happiness in his tones.

"She's put in every story she knows about me," grumbled Dr. Dayman, joining in the conversation. Thyrza resented his doing so, for it left her stranded, the one person who had nothing to say.

"She's actually got the tale of my fat-heads," he continued.

"Your fat-heads?" asked Ambrose.

"Why, yes; there were five old fools in Hartland, and every time one died I planted an apple tree in the corner of the orchard that I used to call my cemetery. I only had the chance to plant three before she carried me off to exile."

"Who is the *Man of Genius?*" asked Ambrose, suddenly turning to Damaris, while the doctor prepared for a new game.

Slowly the colour rose in Damaris Westaway's face, till it flooded her very neck. As her eyes fell before Ambrose's glance, he read the secret, while Thyrza watched the two, and twisted her hands under cover of the tablecloth. But Damaris soon recovered her self-possession.

"He never had your good fortune," she said, "but I've put in a number of things that you told me. Even the story about the old woman who wanted to know if the bees were ear-marked that you claimed as yours. But I don't think I have the real artist's instinct. I suppose you think now of nothing but your buildings, and when you come to die you will feel that your life has not been wasted, if you have added to the beauty of the world. Now I can't feel that. I want to be able to put my hand on some human thing that is the better for me. That's why my father's work is the most precious thing I have. The doctor and I are going to supplement it down here, you know."

"Well, I must confess that I feel the world would get along very well without my tinkering at it," answered Ambrose.

The artist is the last man in the world to understand that vision of a better world which forms the joy of public work. For to the artistic mind the uplift of the spirit which we seek in any widening of the horizon of our personal sympathies comes in the form of every day labour. But by other men the vision of the larger work of the world must be sought outside their profession.

"It was the sorrow of my father's peculiar convictions," said Damaris, "that he seemed to stand aside from the great current of life. I will not do so, although I have no family ties. I can have no children of my body, as it were, but I will of my mind."

All ages are ages of transition, but the fluctuations of our time are almost more vital than those of any other; for this is a time of change in the way men regard their work, the boots they make, the houses they build, the ships, of state or of merchandise, which they steer. In the periods when private work was well done, every man's share of the world's task was just the little job he lived by, and the cobbler stuck to his last. Now, more and more, the honesty of plain craftsmanship is despised; for on all men has come the vision of the larger work of the world, from the ideal of privilege dethroned in favour of justice, down to the questions of public parks and water supplies. Hence the cobbler is abroad tub-thumping, when he ought to be at home hammering honest patches on his shoes whereby to keep out the mud. And to women, who often have no private work, the larger vision of public work comes with regenerating force, for they are not bound by the professional specialism of men, and all their human bias is towards the greater future which dwells in childward-looking thoughts. At present they may plead outside closed doors, yet in their hands is much of the higher future of the world.

"I like you when you talk like that," said Ambrose; "you look like a Valkyrie, a shield-maiden. Let me read the book to-night, for if it resembles you at the present moment it must be like burnished steel."

When Thyrza went upstairs to the solar that Damaris had made the guest-chamber, the bright fire, the pink quilt, the nestling warmth of the room seemed a mockery to her agony of jealousy. She could have torn the quilt in rags and scattered the fire over the room. They had been in the house but two days, yet her brain was full of seething annoyances. The very first night, as they went down to dinner, Ambrose glanced at her, saying—

"You should get Miss Westaway to give you some hints on dressing, Thyrza."

She could hardly see the flowers on the table that evening for tears, as she sat longing for the homely room in Bideford where Mrs. Velly sat. Never before had she seen Ambrose so gaily confident as he was that night; the very buoyancy of his walk was an offence. She afterwards lay sobbing softly for hours, while Ambrose slept peacefully.

Late at night he was sitting alone in the hall. At length he turned the last of the proof sheets, and getting up threw a fresh log on the fire. Though no critic he recognised the peculiar quality of Damaris Westaway's work, its insistence on the movement of life, on its changing lights and shadows. Just as colours in the *plein air* school of painting shift and wane on the solid shapes of the landscape, so the characters of *A Man of Genius* shone through varying lights, unlike the solid entities of the Victorian novelists.

Yet the book pierced deeper far, for it was the story of

Damaris Westaway's heart. Instinct in every line was the spirit of his own life; nothing was forgotten that had ever happened between them, thought after thought that they had shared together was there. In the story of struggle that was told in the book, he read why Tonacombe had passed into Miss Westaway's hands. So he was all this to a woman great in sympathy and insight: at the knowledge his vanity and self-love shrivelled up like a pigmy passion. He sat for a moment, seeing the thing that was—and the thing that might have been; it was impossible for him in that moment to escape the last picture.

Suddenly looking up, his eyes caught the glimmer of something white against the darkness of the portière. There was the other picture, the thing that was: Thyrza, in her long white dress, with her arms tightly strained in front of her. The very sight of the abandon of her dress and attitude was an annoyance. But he tried to be kind.

"Why are you standing there in the draught?" he asked, taking her arm and leading her to the fire. "And why aren't you asleep?"

"I've been waiting for you, crying for you so, dear," she whispered, "and that," she added, pointing to the manuscript, "is all about you, I know it is."

"Cultivate your sense of humour, my child," said he.

"I don't know what that is."

"No, faith, you don't. Neither do I, sometimes, and that's what plays the deuce with us both. Anyhow, every soul on this planet isn't busied solely with thoughts of me."

"Her soul is," said Thyrza defiantly. "I know that. Oh, Ambrose don't put me away from you."

"My dear, how could I put my basil plant away?" he said smiling. "I couldn't, you know, for a basil plant feeds on a murdered man's brains till he becomes a part of it."

The next moment his heart smote him, for, recondite as the allusion would have been to Thyrza in a less illuminating moment, he saw that she understood.

"There, child," said he wearily, "you must be a more considerate woman, if you can't be a rational one. For such feelings as these are absurd—in both of us."

This time she did not understand his allusion, fortunately for herself.

Fretted and fevered with a jealousy that nothing could soothe, Thyrza dragged out the weary hours of the following day, till at last, giving the excuse of a very real headache, she went upstairs to her room. At the top of the staircase she paused with her hand on the rail. Through the window-panes opposite she could see the waving branches of the old fuchsia-tree in the Pleasaunce. She had left Ambrose alone with his hostess in the hall, and this was to be the last day of their stay at Tonacombe. The two thoughts were closely connected in her mind, for though it was evil to spy, yet her doubt was unbearable.

Stepping cautiously across the floor of her bedroom, she removed the blind that covered the arrow-slit and looked into the hall.

There, like a picture set in a frame, she saw it; the fire-light staining the long, narrow windows opposite the hearth, glittering on the icicles that hung from the ivy, and throwing patches of light on the courtyard. Inside the room, the warmth and peace of the great fire filled the air with the charm of summer. Ambrose stood as he had stood the night before, gazing down at Damaris Westaway's bowed head. Outside the firelit circle were the mistakes of the past or these two; only in the present was the leaping flame.

Thyrza remembered another night by the fire, and strained every nerve in the effort not to miss a word. Her ears gradually adapted themselves to the work they were called upon to do, and she began to hear distinctly.

"I know why you bought Tonacombe, Princess," he said quietly, as though holding himself back.

"Ah, can you ever forgive me?" cried Damaris, "for I distrusted you. I feared for you."

"You cared so much, Damaris?"

Her head sank lower as he went on—

"I knew, when I read your book last night what I had missed."

"No, don't say that; for the best still remains to us."

"Ah, Damaris," he laughed, "you used to call me a disciple of Rabelais. I'm that still, I suppose; for to me the best is"—he bent forward so that Thyrza could scarcely catch his words—"the dear comradeship of nights and days, the trust and help, the glow of lives that burn in one."

Thyrza laughed; for somewhere in the past, she, too, had heard words like this. So, she thought, when it came to the last, the princess and the beggar woman were wooed alike.

"You made me marry for the child's sake."

Then Damaris seemed to awake.

"No, Ambrose, no," she cried, "but for the sake of a woman who loves you with every fibre of her true heart. Loves you, yes, as well as I do."

Slowly the room was darkening. Then, at last he said steadily, dropping the words one by one into the stillness.

"Then you love me? It is true."

Thyrza was quite cold and still now. She could hear her husband's sneer at listeners; knew quite well the code of morality. But now it concerned her no more than the fashion of the night-dress in which she would die.

"Yes, Ambrose," said Damaris; "all these months and years I've been learning the way of love."

Thyrza crouched closer, with breaths that came in jerks.

"My darling!"

"No; not as you think, Ambrose. The way of love, I said. Real love, I mean. 'Tis the way of love to bear hard things, to watch, to grow tired in the service of another. The sweetest thing in all the world is to do the tiniest service for one that's dear. That's why I bought this place, because I would have you stainless in honour. It's true, I love you. I would say it before Thyrza."

They were standing now, and she placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Why was I fool enough to wait so long?" he exclaimed, blindly misunderstanding her.

"Listen," said Damaris, while Thyrza felt tears that were not all of misery start to her eyes, for she understood though the man was blind.

"I met on the road the passion that you dream of," said Damaris, "and I killed it. Now I can go without the love that is Thyrza's. I want to suffer for you. Suffering is the only passion I will know."

Only the sap hissed and the blood coursed in the veins of three. Thyrza was rocking herself to and fro, like a woman in bodily agony.

"It is the very height of life, that you refuse," said Ambrose; "for all the greatest moments of life, the great creative hours, are but the shadows of love's delight."

"And I tell you that I will give you the greatest love. We must not meet again in the flesh, but I shall be always there, in your greatest work, in your highest thought. I call for the best in you, Ambrose, and I know I don't call in vain. Give me up and I shall be part of the glory of the world to you. The greatest thing in you is your love of beauty. Let me be part of it, for you. If it came to pass that we—fell, I should feel that both you and I were creatures in filthy dress crawling into the banquet hall of a king. She will give you little children," her voice broke for a moment, "but I will give you the great deed she cannot. I will have nothing but the highest from you.

"You shall have it," he said after a long silence.

Thus they shared the high joy that is the heart of agony.

As Ambrose left the hall, swinging the door into the outer passage behind him, Thyrza sank down on the floor of her room. The world had grown cold to her, like a dead planet to the last man left alive on it. Yet in the darkness one phrase sank deep, it was: "I will give you the great deed she cannot."

Thyrza almost smiled at the certainty that rang in the words, for Damaris was so sure that the mean woman for whom they stood apart could not share the greatness of renunciation.

Then, hastily scrambling to her feet, she tore off her dress and put on, instead, a shabby grey frock, with an old black hat and ulster. Her inheritance stood her in good stead now, for she was dressing for the open road that led away from the old dark house of memories.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FLIGHT OF A SEAMEW

FLITTING like a shadow down the staircase and from the Pleasaunce to the avenue, Thyrza stood between the eagles on the gate-posts for a moment, looking back as she recalled the night of their arrival, when Damaris had come down "the street" to meet them. Somewhere in the midst of the walled paradise strewn with ash of hoar frost and filmy with floating clouds overhead, there were words whose echoes were ringing still. But everything came deadened to Thyrza's senses now, for mortal injury of body or mind is often painless.

On the ice of the slippery meadow-path she fell as she climbed to the ancient Bush Inn, its thatch a glitter of frost. Her way lay across the churchyard, but ghostly terrors had no meaning now, and in the dusk she walked as steadily down the graveyard path as between the trees of the valley that leads to the sea. At the mouth of the combe, where the stream falls over a lip of rock, she lay down and flung the bundle of outdoor clothes that she carried on to the rocks below, where the tide would wash them against the toothed escarpment at the foot of Hennacliff.

Then she turned away inland. In the stillness she could trace all along the coast the echoing note of every wave that broke on the rocks, until at length the sea murmurs lengthened into the faint stir of leafless tree-branches. As hill and level passed and repassed, weighted lead instead of fibre and muscle, seemed to fill her limbs, till she felt the weariness that eats into the eye-sockets like a canker. At last she came to a wood-stack by the side of a field, with behind it a hay-mow where great ledges had been left in the cutting. Into this she climbed, and wrapping herself in wisps torn from the side, fell asleep, like a mouse in a sweet-scented cranny.

Thyrza awoke at last to the stars that paled before the dawn, and numbed now in feet and hands, she trudged on, steadily setting before herself a fixed purpose to reach Bradworthy, where by now little Ambrose would be staying with Chrissie Rosevear, whilst Mrs. Velly began the preparations for the removal from Bideford.

The air was full now of the cold of coming snow. Yet sunrise was near, and presently a robin hopped in the withered hedge, as the red eye of the sun peered through the russet leaves of the hazel bushes. Pausing on the brow of a hill, between two pine trees that stretched out skinny arms, red and tanned like the limbs of two old hags, Thyrza began to pick sticks from the hedge for a fire. Over the east a tawny smear of mist, like the smoke of a furnace, was staining the frost; blue in the west lay a world of folded hills. Over in Bradworthy Chrissie would be bathing the boy: Thyrza remembered it as she glanced from her own grimed hands to the leaden glitter of ice in the gutter.

As she took to the road again there came the first snowflakes, and before long the ways were thick in soft layers that blotted out all footprints almost as soon as they were traced. In a drift of vapoury snow the past was forgotten, as the grey shadows closed round the solitary figure. She wandered many times out of her way, for the farmhouses, at which she halted twice to get a meal, were at long distances apart. Once she got a lift in a baker's cart. But for the most part there was nothing but deep-cut lanes, where ice-sheathed branches closed overhead, alternating with open country that seethed with flickering snowflakes. Only the wind murmured of the road and the steady tread of dogged feet through the silken whisper of the falling snow. Past and present had vanished now in sheer weariness.

When at last she reached Bradworthy, every roof was a weighted mass of snow. She knocked again and again on the door of Chrissie's darkened house, but no answer came. This rebuff awoke her fully, for now it seemed that the whole universe was the enemy of Thyrza Velly. She felt as a lad feels when a full-grown man strikes him across the face.

"I'll not die," she cried; "I'll not be flung away."

At last, within, Mrs. Rosevear half turned at the sound of the loud hammering.

"Chrissie, whatever can it be?" said John.

Wide awake she started up, and before his slower wits had moved was leaning out of the bedroom window.

"It's me, Thyrza," said the snow-covered figure outside.

In a moment Chrissie was downstairs unbolting the door.

"What is it? What is it?" cried John, as he followed, his nightcap "pointing" like a dog at his shadow that danced on the wall in the light of the candle.

"It's the dead come back, I reckon," snapped Mrs. Rosevear, even in that moment of excitement enjoying the quiver she produced in her husband. When at last they got the door open, she half carried Thyrza across the room to the armchair, exclaiming—

"There now, I know it all. They was here this afternoon to look for 'ee."

"You'll not give me up, Chrissie?"

"Not if you don't want to go back," said she, unfastening Thyrza's sodden shoes, while John stirred the embers into a blaze, his honest face a mask of perplexity at these untoward happenings.

"What do they think?" asked Thyrza. "Did you see Ambrose?"

"They believe you'm dead. No, he didn't come. He'd gone to Bideford. Oh, Thyrza, whatever is all this stour about?"

Thyrza had lost her way several times; it was owing to this fact that she had not been overtaken.

"I'm not the wife of 'en. She is."

"Wild words, cheeld. You'll have to go back to 'en. If the truth was known, you're longing to be back now."

"Chrissie," said Thyrza, standing up, "if you don't give me your sacred word of honour that you'll never tell him I've been here, I shall go straight away this minute. I'm naught to Ambrose, but the thing that's spoiling his life. She's everything to 'en."

"I'll warn he thinks so," snapped Chrissie, "and afore he's clay-cold he'll think the same of a dozen more. 'Tis a man's nature to, for they can't none of 'em keep more'n half an eye off the maidens. But, Lord, what's that, when you can always make a bed of thorns for 'en night times. I'll warrant, if 'twas me, I'd give 'en what for. Who's the maid?"

"Miss Westaway," said Thyrza curtly.

"And that I'll never believe," cried Chrissie; "and you'm a downright little trollop to think such a thing."

"Oh, she talked about giving 'en up, as if there was nobody else in the world that could do that," answered Thyrza proudly.

This was overdeep water for Chrissie, so she changed the subject.

"Your cheeld's here now," said she; "he's upstairs a-bed."

"Oh, Chrissie, let me go to 'en, there's a dear."

"No, no, you'll frighten the l'ile soul into fits if you go up same as you be now. Wait till you've had a sup of something hot."

"No, Chrissie, let me go," she sobbed, as the good woman would have held her back. "Let me have 'en. I won't frighten 'en. I've been longing for 'en all day. He's all I've got in the world now."

"Let her go, woman," said John sternly; "don't keep her back from her cheeld. Show her where the l'ile chap is."

And Chrissie, awestricken for once at her man's handling of the reins, led the way upstairs. Opening the door of the boy's room, she whispered—

"There he is."

In the midst of a billowy wave of feathers there was a slight depression, with hummocks on either side and a dint on the pillow, where a shadow appeared.

Half an hour later Chrissie came in with a tray. Then she exclaimed, for there lay Thyrza with the child's body across her own. He was still sound asleep, for she had managed to drag herself under him, without arousing him to more than a sleepy whimper. His body lay across her bare breast, and the healing streams of tears were running down her cheeks.

"I didn't wake 'en," she whispered. "But, oh, Chrissie, I've ached for this all the day, to feel his weight again." Then, as Chrissie held the tea to her lips, she said, "His father doesn't want me. But I'm his woman, for he gave me this."

She fell suddenly asleep, while Chrissie stood watching with the empty cup in her hand. The child wriggled closer to the warmth, and in sleep the mother smiled.

When she got downstairs Mrs. Rosevear's face was a satyr's, for she was forcing back the tears in a steady grimace.

"What a poor wambling mortal you be, John," she snapped. "What's the use of your staying up? You'll be a reg'lar zany to-morrow, with all your eyes screwed up for want of sleep."

Then she broke down.

"She's not wanted, John, she's not wanted; and I'm sore afeared of what's coming to the poor soul."

"Ay," said John, "when a wife leaves her man, 'tis pretty nigh as bad as death or making a hole in the water, for life closes over her pretty nigh afore she's touched bottom."

The next day Thyrza came downstairs and quietly announced that she was going on to Bideford to help Mrs. Velly. She was quite calm now, but her farewell to the child was said upstairs, away from the presence of witnesses, as Chrissie afterwards remembered. At the inn she hired a trap and was rapidly driven along the Bideford Road, while Chrissie stood for a long while watching the dog-cart disappear in the distance. Had Thyrza departed as she had come, on foot and bedraggled, Chrissie would have tried to prevent her leaving, but in her quiet assurance and, above all, in her possession of money for the drive, there was a certain aspect of power that overawed the good woman.

At last Thyrza stood at the coastguard point of Appledore. The wind had changed in the night, and over sea and sky floated the delicate mist, half cloud, half veil of glory that scuds before a sou'-wester, here rent into patches that showed the blue, there massed into mountains of cloud. At the river mouth a luminous mist against the sky-line marked the spray of the bar; curling tongues of breakers rolled up the river between the sand-banks and the quay, and up the tideway dashed a race of waters, tearing to fill "the guts" and embed the gravel flats that at low tide lie like huge dank slugs in the river-bed. Behind the lighthouse on the dunes facing Appledore itself shone a tawny bed of sand, desert-like and sunscorched against the blue of the estuary.

The life that was in some sort her own, the life of the sea, had engulfed Thyrza's brain; she felt no pain now, as she retraced her steps to an inlet of the beach where she could remain till the evening. In front of her was the workshop of a firm of ship-breakers, deserted by the men at high tide. Against the lines of sea and sand the ribs of a wooden hulk projected from the water, like the fin of a mastodon. Next to it towered the black promontory of a vessel only recently moored there for its execution. The beach behind was heaped with spars of salted timber and iron fittings that shone with the red leprosy of briny rust. The place was a ships' charnel-house, hideous with ruin and ominous with the powers of destruction, for to these vessels the death that came not by wave or sandbank was inevitable at the hands of man.

As the sun set, in the stillness there came the song of a robin. Persistently, gaily he piped, balanced on the edge of a companion ladder, singing of the joys of nesting time amid these ugly memories of the sea-horror. On and on he trilled against the black shadows of the ships.

Over at the mouth of the river Torridge, John Darracott sat in the door of the deserted boathouse where he lived, mending a salmon net that trailed on the sand in front of him. For next May he would be among the toiling figures that haul the heavy meshes over the dunes by the lighthouse.

The sand deadened Thyrza's footsteps, and the hummocky mounds of bent grass over which she had to pass hid her figure till she came quite close to him.

Then she cried, "John, John, I've come to 'ee."

As he started to his feet, the roar of the pebble ridge receded to a far distance, and the hiss of spray on the bar was stilled in the ears of the two. Then, as Darracott was still silent, Thyrza moved closer, holding out her hands—

"Take me in, John," she whispered, "for I've nowhere else to go."

He led her into the boathouse. The ground floor, lit by one dim window, was cobbled with pebbles and stacked with logs of wreckwood. At one end a ladder led to an upper story.

"Can 'ee get up this, my dear?" he asked, seeing her to be half fainting.

"Yes, John, in a minute," she whispered.

But he would not wait, and lifting her like a child he carried her up the ladder into a long, low room that looked on the sea. Here the old furniture brought back Hartland Quay, and as he laid her on a wooden bunk against the wall she felt herself in safe harbourage at last.

Presently she was lifted by a hand that fitted cleverly into the curves of her head, and a cup of tea, was held to her lips.

"I'll be better in a minute," she said, as he gave her more with bits of bread soaked in it.

Darracott stood looking at her with infinite tenderness while she lay with closed eyes. Then he turned away, as though to watch her resting was a sort of liberty. It was wonderful how quietly he managed to move about the room.

At last Thyrza roused herself, and standing up came over to the hearth chair. With a stricture of heart John remembered how many hundreds of times he had pictured her sitting there. It was all complete now, even to the "yellow dog" of no special breed who licked her fingers with his long red tongue.

"Thyrza," said Darracott at last, "can 'ee tell me what's the matter? Or if you'd rather not, we'll let it bide till you'm better."

She felt his anxiety under the quiet tones he had purposely assumed.

"I came from terrible things, John," she said, looking at him pitifully.

How was it possible, he asked himself, that Thyrza, the wife of a man who loved her, could know anything of "terrible things." Darracott knew a great deal of the cruelty that lives in sordid alleys beneath the blackened roofs and patched slates of a fishing town, for across the gleaming splendour of the estuary, ill-houses flourished, where every room was a dumb horror. He knew one indeed, where maids were drugged, and from which one girl had fled to the outstretched arms of the clean sea. Yet such could not be Thyrza's story.

"Tell me," he cried, "tell me, as if I was your own brother, for there isn't anything as you couldn't say to me, my dear. And if there's any help that can be given, by God, you shall have it."

"John," she said, holding out her hands, "it's all been took from me. I've no man, no child, no home. Will 'ee take me, for I do belong to you?"

"Thyrza," he cried, touching her head gently as she leant on his arm, "you don't know what you'm saying. Will I take you? Oh, my maid, my maid!"

Then she pushed him away, and speaking more collectedly, tried hard to arrange her thoughts.

"I found out on the road to-day where you lived, but I always meant to come to you from the first. There's nowhere else for me to go, for they'd all give me up to him. 'Twas you that married me to him; but I won't go back."

"What has he done, Thyrza?"

"He wants another woman. It's Damaris Westaway that he would have married, if it hadn't been for you."

"I'll not believe any evil of her," said Darracott sternly. "She's not one as would come between man and wife."

"Oh," cried Thyrza trembling, "they both think I've spoiled his life. I heard 'em. I heard every word. I never was the woman for him. John, will 'ee take me?"

"You've a child," said John quietly, after a moment's pause. In the stillness she could hear his laboured breathing.

"Yes," she said in a frightened whisper.

"The law would give it to him, if you was to come to me like this. Could 'ee bear that?"

"I shouldn't be good enough to care for a child, you mean; that's what they'd think. Not my own child? Surely, they wouldn't take it from me? It's mine; I bore it. And you'd take it, I know."

"That's the law."

"I should hurt 'en, you mean. I shouldn't be a good woman, then, that could teach a child good. John, I'm not that now; for he had to marry me . . . to save my good name."

She had suffered before, but never as she did now, when she glanced for a second at his face.

"Nothing'll ever change 'ee to me," he said at length; "nothing, not the very smoke of the pit. You'm always Thyrza to me—the little maid that come down beside me into the very depths."

"Then you'll take me? For you do love me true."

"No; I'll not do 'ee this harm. What would it be like when you turned on me as the man who made 'ee forget all that's good? For I should have robbed 'ee of everything—child, honesty, all. Even the man you care for still; for you love 'en still. Don't 'ee, my dear?"

"Iss, John, somewhere I do. He loved me tender once, and he gave me the child."

"Ay, lass," he said bitterly, "'twas a'most worse than a base born child would have been, to come to me, with him in your heart all the time."

"But what can I do, John?" she asked humbly.

"Bide here till the heart comes back to 'ee. I'm a marked man, so there's not a soul that ever comes into this place. You may rest quiet here for months; and there's no need for anybody to know you'm here, not if you'm careful. 'Twill give 'ee time to find your bearings."

"But you, John? I can't turn you out."

"I'm to work all day over on the banks, and night-times I can easy sling a hammock below. You'll put me out no more than the old yellow dog that come limping across the flats last summer. Beaten and starved he'd been, but he's got a home now."

To his simple straightforwardness they were both shipwrecked, with the yellow dog for company, and she no more shrank from his offer than she would have from his help on a desert island.

"That's right, my dear," he said cheerfully, as he saw her look of acquiescence. "And now, when I come home night-times, there'll be a bright fire waiting for me, I know."

The existence of a love like Darracott's is like a bursting ray, a light from a leaden sky, giving promise of that golden sun of blessing that still shines beyond the storms of this rude world. Yet, in his hammock that night, he lay gazing into the face of his own stern honesty, as he asked himself whether the tide would ever carry Thyrza into safe anchor-age; for she panted like a storm-driven bird that had dashed against his window, and in his hands that held her there was an answering passion. As he heard her sob once overhead, his heart swelled with a love that it took all his strength to conceal. Yet she was not his, and in her helplessness less his than ever.

CHAPTER XXV

THE JUDGMENT OF THE NETHER GODS

"NO, no," cried Damaris, startled out of her usual composure, "not that, not that. It isn't possible." She had been schooling herself for the inevitable evening that must be spent with her guests, for they would necessarily be most difficult hours, but here, in Ambrose Velly's curt words, there leapt at her a horror that turned the cosy hall into a torture chamber.

"But," persisted Ambrose, "the shutter of the solar's down and she—has not come back. I must get the farm men to search the cliffs. I will tell them that we fear Mrs. Velly must have met with an accident."

Presently she heard the shouts of men in the "streets," as she tried to realize what Thyrza must have suffered, and endeavoured to reconstruct the tragedy of these last hours. But over all there was the sense of unreality, the dream-like feeling that she must soon awake. Hastily running upstairs to the minstrel gallery, and thence to her room, she threw on a cloak and hat. For to wait in that stillness for what might be happening outside was impossible.

Once in the open air she turned towards Greenway, in which direction she could see the lanthorns carried by the searchers. As her footsteps echoed on the hard, dry road, Damaris felt as though she were walking on her own heart, for the place was filled with nothing but memories of these last few days, and it was with these memories that she must live henceforth. In the moonlight the almost phosphorescent trunks of the trees round the ancient fish-stews were a company of grey ghosts. Among them she could see Thyrza, as she had knelt on the thick mould of leaf castings to gaze into the ponds, then brown-speckled with dapplings of sunlight and shadow, like the markings of a trout's back. In the opposite field she had leant to look into the well-house and listen to the hidden spring that gurgled in its depths. And now Damaris could see her beating on weak wings against the hurricane, a life for which her weakness was never intended.

At last she turned back towards the house again, for it was impossible for her to walk the cliffs, as Ambrose and the men were doing. Pacing up and down "the street," she waited, till at length there came the noise of hurried footsteps. It was a farm-boy, breathless with running, who handed her a page torn from a pocket-book, with the word "Come," written on it in Ambrose Velly's hand.

"They've found clothes under Hennacliff," said the boy, his nostrils quivering with his breath.

In the valley by the church Damaris met the men returning. Over the arm of one hung some dark garments, and all along the coast came the lonely moaning of the tide. Yet she thought, for all the noise, it told no secret. Holding a lanthorn up, Ambrose asked her in a low voice to look at the clothes.

"Yes, these were hers," she said, with dazed eyes, as she turned them over on the man's arm. "Wait," she said as the men passed up the narrow path. "Wait, Ambrose, there's something I must say."

The undertone of the water below the rock sounded thunderous, as they stood together in the rapidly increasing darkness.

"It's not as you think," she said sharply, "I'm certain it's not. I've a woman's instinct, and I know you can trust it."

"It'll be in on the ninth day, if not to-morrow," he said dully.

"She never drowned herself, Ambrose. A desperate woman would not have cast off her clothes; for the horror of the cold would have made her keep on everything she wore, with a vague sensation of warding off the chill of the water. I know it. I've sent men from the Bush along the roads, for that's where she'll be found, if she has not been gone too long to be overtaken."

"God bless you, Damaris."

"Ah, no, for 'tis I who brought this on you. I, and I only. But we cannot go back now, and to wish words unsaid is futile. Come quickly back to Tonacombe and see what she can be wearing."

The brisk action of the last minutes had set her frozen blood flowing, her paralysed brain working.

Yet, as they turned out the wardrobe in the solar, even Damaris's confidence was shaken, for there appeared to be none missing of all the dresses they had seen her wear, except the garments found on the beach.

"That takes away the last hope," said Ambrose. "My God, I'd give all the past and all the future to bring her back. The future, what's that to me now!"

"No, no; there must have been other clothes that we know nothing about, Ambrose. Go to your mother and find out."

As he rode away, after one hand-clasp and a faltering good-bye, Damaris tasted the bitterness of self, for now his ambitions, his love for herself, were nothing, when weighed in the balance with his passionate desire to make amends to Thyrza. She went back to the lonely hall to sit down to write Dr. Dayman, who had gone to London the previous day. With a stab of pain, Damaris remembered that, had he only put off his visit to town a day later this misery would have been avoided. For with the old man bustling in and out, intimate conversation would have been impossible.

By noon next day every coastguard point and every police station had received notice of the tragedy, but it was evening before Ambrose reached Bideford, and turning in from the snowy street, opened the door of his house. The sight of Mrs. Velly placidly packing china in great cases unmanned Ambrose more than anything that had gone before, so vivid were the pictures of their joint life that it called up. Leaning on the mantelpiece, now fagged to the uttermost point of endurance, he told his tale in five curt sentences.

She never said a word, but pushing him into a chair, stood softly patting his shoulder, as she had done hundreds of times in his childhood at some fit of rage or impatience.

"She'd never have stripped herself," she said at last, "with the real death agony upon her."

"Ah," cried Ambrose, "that's what Miss Westaway said. But there's no good taking comfort in that, for we searched her boxes, and there was nothing missing that she could have worn."

"You don't know all she took with her, Ambrose, but I do."

Then, after a moment's consideration, she said, "Was there an old grey tweed in the box? For that's what she would wear to walk in of a winter night. And her old ulster and sailor hat. For she took 'em specially against any cliff climbing, 'though,' says she, 'I'll hardly dare put 'em on, so grand it'll be there.'"

"Are you certain she took those clothes, mother?" said

Ambrose, starting, "for I know the ones you mean—and they weren't there."

"Absolutely certain. But come upstairs and look for yourself, if they're there."

With a fresh spring of hope in his heart, Ambrose wired particulars to the police stations, but next morning Thyrza drove into Bideford in clothes that Chrissie had lent her.

A fortnight later a dog-cart that splashed the pools into flurries of mud was spinning into Hartland by the Bideford road. As it approached the village the sudden glare of fire lit up the faces of the occupants, Ambrose Velly and a man hired at Bideford.

"There's some sort of a randy toward by the look of it," said the driver, "and 'tisn't pancake day neither. And if 'twas, they've long given up going round begging and throwing shards at every door that wouldn't give. I can mind going round as a boy though, shouting—

'Flish, flash; flish, flash,
Watter, watter, ling,
Hev 'ee any pancakes?
Plaze to let us in.

'Have 'ee any best beer?
Have 'ee any small?
Plaze vor give us some then,
Or nothen at all.'"

He swung his head in time to the measure.

"Get down," said Ambrose, "and hold the horse's head. The place has gone off its head to-night."

From a bush of gorse that projected between two tar-barrels sprang a hissing spiral of sparks and flame. The light of it flashed on the windows of the King's Head Hotel and on the blackened face of the man who was holding the torch to the mass of logs and faggots that stood in the village square. Since dusk stealthy figures had been hurrying to and fro between the wood-pile and the hoards secretly stored in the houses and linhays of Hartland.

At the signal the village began to hum like a hive of bees, while from the darkness of the fields sounded a confused roar, not coming in flashes like the cheers from a football field, but circling in discordant cacophony over hedges and ditches. It was apparently wheeling in narrowing circles closer and closer to the huddle of houses among the trees. As it approached, the roar became disintegrated into the separate sounds that composed it, into the skirl of mouth organs, the hee-haws of the human jackass, the blast of horns and the rattle of tin pans and biscuit-boxes loaded with stones. Clear above all was the ear-blasting sound of a bullock's horn blown by lusty lungs.

The windows of the square were lined with grinning heads that cheered lustily as the crowd flattened three substantial members of the rural police against the railings. These homely men, whose main duty it is to see that sheep are duly dipped according to regulations, were about as able to cope with the trouble as Dogberry and Verges would have been. One house alone, in all the place, was dark and closely shuttered.

"It's the hunting of the stag, sir," said the driver with a grin, as Ambrose jumped down and joined him at the horse's head, for with staring eyeballs it was dancing nervously at the din. "We'd best get 'un out of this, for he'd go like the very wind if he got his head in this shindy. There's a back way round to the stables, praise be."

"Who is it they're hunting?" asked Ambrose of a man who stood near.

"Old Solomon Sadd. The lads ha' been getting tar-barrels and vizards together since Michaelmas. He's a married with a fam'ly, but he got a girl into trouble last spring and the boys'll make him pay for it, the old rapscallion!"

From the window of the inn parlour Ambrose watched the last stages of the orgy, feeling as though he himself were being flayed by the mockery of his peers. It was Solomon Sadd they were hunting for his actual misdemeanours, but it was Ambrose, with his quick sensitiveness, who was bearing the fullest pangs. For, had Damaris been less noble, had they "fallen," as she phrased it, this coarse rite would have been earned by them. To Ambrose, the idea of such a trail of mud over the purity of her life was as abhorrent as a leer of suggestion from the eyes of a Madonna, and for a moment, in the horror of such profanation, he lost even his sorrow for Thyrza's misery. As he watched the flames that leapt towards the grinning masks, he felt as though the noble effort of Damaris' struggle had been washed away in a stream of ribaldry. How far it seemed from the wood-scented stillness of Tonacombe to this; yet behind the passion that masquerades as a god there was this dance of satyrs, this judgment of the nether gods. And weighed in the balance of the true facts of life, the Rabelaisian verities, indeed, this judgment was the only true one.

Had the "hunting" been aimed directly at himself, instead of at Solomon, Ambrose would have fought it with contempt, but this side blow grazed his skin with the irritation of startled nerves. For to the spectator the battle is often more nerve-shaking than to the actual combatants, who are themselves plunged back in the savagery of earlier ages, since to glance into the seething depths of the crude passion in which our forefathers wallowed is more illuminating than to bathe in it.

The culminating ceremony of the judgment had begun in the square by now.

In the midst of a rout of blackened faces, rode a man, on a hackney, holding in front of him a moon-faced effigy that leered with chalky features and represented Solomon Sadd. From the sleeves of the straw-stuffed figure projected dummy fingers, podgy and stiff. The ram's horns fastened to the forehead of the image had slipped sideways into one of the staring, chalk-rimmed eyes. Immediately behind the "stag" rode a man in a vizard, with two "whips" on either side, each carrying a bladder on a string.

The end came in the roar of flame and the press of struggling bodies, when the bladders full of bullock's blood were burst over the culprit's doorway and over the effigy that, still smouldering, was finally dragged along the street on a burning tar-barrel.

Once common in all the country from Exmoor to the Cornish border, where the deer roamed wild in the days of our forefathers, "the hunting of the stag" is a curious survival of primitive savagery and of primitive justice. In the words of one of the bystanders, it "always leaves the female alone," and is always aimed at a married man who betrays a maiden. The pack has to run over three parishes to escape the "lash of the law," and in many villages in the ancient stag-hunting district, there may be found a man whose proudest boast it is that he was chosen to act the stag, for in cases where no farmer will lend a horse, the stags are chosen from the best runners of the district.

Ambrose had come over to Hartland to meet Dr. Dayman, and as the hunting chorus faded in the distance, he heard the doctor's voice from the passage.

"Yes, it's rough," said he, "and, like many rough things, wholesome. If they'd carried the spirit of stag-hunting into their law-making, we should have cleaner bills of health by now. The heart of the people's right every time."

The two men greeted one another coldly, and then the doctor, nodding in the direction of the square, said grimly—

"So they got up an entertainment against your arrival here. I suppose you saw that?"

A wave of hot colour flooded young Velly's face.

"Yes," he said; "I saw it."

"Brought things home a bit, I should say," remarked the doctor; "for that's the way we treat a man who forgets himself to a woman."

"Dr. Dayman, if I could undo—but that's futile, as Mr. Westaway told us. You were to bring me a message from Miss Westaway?"

"I bring one, young man. And, in my opinion, it's the wisest thing she's said for a good spell. I knew it would be wigs on the green if you came to Tonacombe. A sheer matter of flame and pitch, as I told her. But she wouldn't listen to a word, not she."

"You think my wife will never be found?"

"I think there'll be a shadow over another noble woman till she is found," snapped Dr. Dayman. "That's what I'm most concerned about."

It was a satisfaction to him to look at young Velly's harassed, jaded face, with the quivering nerves that played round the eye-sockets.

"I suppose," said Ambrose, "there are some things that God himself can't undo. And one of those things is my reverence and respect for Miss Westaway."

"There, boy, there, I know. Damn it all, I'm a prating nincompoop, and if she could hear me maundering on like this she'd never forgive me. But truth's truth, though the devil say it. And when I watch her, day after day, trying long jobs of mechanical drawing to tire herself out, why, I wonder if the fiends do thumb-nail sketches of the topography of the pit."

"But her message?"

"Ay, her message. 'Twas this. That if she has any influence with you, if you have even any thought of her peace of mind, you'll not bring a double ruin on yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"That you'll go away to the building of the Oratory and not throw away the chance that's been offered you."

"And not know whether my wife's above ground or not!" exclaimed Ambrose.

"Any clue?"

"Not a ghost of one. I can't go."

"Yes, you can."

At the familiar phrase, remembrance quivered through Ambrose Velly's very heart-strings.

"Wait," continued Dr. Dayman, "I haven't finished yet. If you will go and leave the work to her, no stone shall be left unturned to find your wife. Without you, Damaris will have a clearer hand. And she will begin with Chrissie Rosevear."

"Why," exclaimed Ambrose, "I not only sent there, but I went there myself afterwards."

"And what did she do?"

"Said Thyrza'd been there one time too many, and as to where she was now, she 'didn't know no more than the dead.' And slapped the door in my face."

"She won't in Damaris Westaway's face," said Dr. Dayman quietly. "So, I am to say that you'll go away and fight your fight there?"

"And leave her to fight mine here," said Ambrose bitterly.

"Gad, man, that's just what she has done pretty nigh always for 'ee."

"So she has."

"Then let her fight once more. It will give her more peace than aught else, and at your hands she deserves that.

She'll do it with all her heart, and she never broke her word in her life. For if she swore she'd bite the head off a tenpenny nail, she'd do it."

"I'm stripped of everything," said Ambrose.

"We mostly do begin stripped," said the doctor blandly, "and for my part, I like 'ee best that way. For there's something rather uppish about you at your top-dog times. But I knew 'ee when you were mother-naked, and I can stand 'ee very well like that."

Ambrose laughed and felt the better for it, since the exercise brought with it a little strength for the backward fling of the head with which he usually faced the fight.

"I don't believe Thyrza's really gone," said he inconsequently.

"And if she came back, what then, Velly?"

"She should have everything I could give her, sir, of peace and honour, for, my God, how she must have suffered before she . . . went away."

Being a wise man Dr. Dayman said nothing, but he knew that Ambrose, taught by the world's hard lessons, was learning something of that patient forbearance which has more to do with married happiness than any gift of brain or body.

"Then," said he, seizing his chance, "give another woman, one to whom you owe everything, the trust she asks of you, and go and do the work she fought to gain for you. Will you, my lad? For if you haven't sucked as much sweetness out of posies as I reckoned you would, yet all the same, I believe that out of the fighter has come forth strength. I think you'll go now," he added after a pause.

And Ambrose did.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GATES OF DAWN

DOWN in West Appledore, Irsha Street was echoing with life. Overhead a narrow slit of star-strewn sky was visible, and below, from the low, whitewashed cottages, sounded a concertina, accompanied by the wails of children and the shouting of men. In the open doorways women stood rocking babies to sleep and calling shrilly to each other. Lovers whispered at the entrances to the side "drangs," boys yelled at their games, cats hunted scraps in reeking gutters.

Through the swarming life John Darracott swung along in his high boots and fisherman's rig. At the window of one of the houses a prim little girl crouched, gravely wrestling with the knitting of a stocking, and Darracott paused for a moment to watch her; the sight made him smile, but the next moment he sighed. As he crossed Northam burrows on his way to the boathouse, he saw that even in this wind-swept place of regained sand, the spring was busy with the low roots of thyme and sea-thrift. He stood for a second in the shadow of the boathouse, watching the light from the room above. For in his heart, as in the sea-thrift, there was the uprising of the spring. He did not wait long, however, for the light drew him, and soon he was climbing the ladder.

"That's something like," he said, glancing from the lamp-lit supper-table to the fire on the hearth. "It used to be a burnt-out grate that I come home to. And how've 'ee been all day, my dear?" He noticed a faint shadow on the face that was beginning to regain its brightness.

"'Twas wisht-like, here alone all day," she said; "and the sea's been very loud somehow. But I don't mind now you're here. Though come to that, if it wasn't for the sound of the sea, 'twould be lonier far. Besides, I like to be near it, for I was born in the sound of it."

She was pouring a stew of corned beef and vegetables into a dish, as she talked.

"Ay," nodded John, "'tis old and strange, the sea is. There's never any spring-time comes to it. 'Tis the oldest thing on the earth, I reckon."

There was a sense of strangeness to-night, and the roar of the pebble-ridge seemed coming nearer and nearer. In its continuous booming, audible for miles inland, the hiss of spray on the bar was lost.

"My boy come in a storm," said Thyrza, as they sat down to their meal.

Darracott glanced at her curiously, for it was almost the first time in all these weeks that she had mentioned the child.

"Oh, John, I hear 'en crying sometimes," she said, covering her face with her hands. "It comes on the wind."

"My dear, my dear," said Darracott tenderly, "I doubted but what you were a-hungered for 'en."

His tone awoke her to a sense of her own selfishness.

"There," she said, dashing away her tears, "don't 'ee worrit about me, John. Did you draw those fishes?" she asked, nodding at the sketches he had brought from Hartland Quay.

"Ay," he said; "I've sat upon a fish maund to Clovelly many and many a time and drawed 'em in. I've always wanted to know about Her," he continued meditatively, as he jerked a thumb towards the sea. "For 'tis dullish going to work day after day with nothing for your mind to play upon. I never was one to go with a mate neither. 'Tis queer what stuff comes up from Her, particularly with a dredger."

"Is it true about the queer marks on the drowned folk? I've heard women talking about 'em."

"Iss, that's octopus marks. 'Tis like this here: the conger is the only fish that can tackle an octopus, and when the conger gets scarcer, the octopus gets more plentiful. That's the way of it. But," he continued, as they got up from table, "I've got something for you to look at here."

He handed her a big parcel, and filling his pipe, sat down to watch her open it. The question of its contents had been a serious matter of cogitation to John, during many hours of the monotonous toil of gravel-loading.

At length it was opened, and Thyrza laid on the table a length of calico, sundry reels of cotton, a packet of blue jersey wool, and a set of great knitting needles.

Her eyes filled, for now she remembered that three evenings ago she had found him turning the folds of a much-mended garment that lay across a chair-back by the fire. It was the one she had carried in her pack on the night when she fled from Tonacombe.

"For a new bedgown," he said simply; "and I thought while you were about it, you might so well knit me a jersey too."

In the cord of the parcel was caught a knot of violets. Many times before, she had found on the table a little bunch of flowers. At the sight of them she exclaimed—

"Oh, John, John, you're that good to me, and I can't pay you back. There's nothing I can do for you, nothing. And you spend too much on me. For I know you smoke a deal less than you used to do. Oh, John, it didn't ought to be, it didn't, indeed."

The next moment she had slipped to her knees and he felt a butterfly kiss on his hands. For all that his skin was callous with labour, the touch of it reached his heart.

"Thyrza, don't you never do that again," he said hoarsely.

She glanced at his face and shivered, for on it was the worse fear a man can know, the fear of himself. Then he got up and went quietly out of the room, and she saw no more of him that evening. She sat motionless for a long time after he had gone, knowing that the gates of this refuge were closing behind her. In her lonely brooding it was a relief to feel the yellow dog slip a damp nose into her hand. But his master did not come, and as she waited, Thyrza fell to a low sobbing that tore her heart for pity, since John, remembering her loneliness, must have sent the dog back to her, for Rough would never have come else. Darracott thought of everything, he forgot nothing in his steady love, and the knowledge of the struggle he was going through pierced deeper and deeper into her heart. Yet where was there a place of shelter for her?

It was past midnight when Thyrza awoke from her first sleep that night, and lying there in her bunk she felt that she was alone in the house. Leaning on her elbow, she listened for a moment: there was no sound save the snoring of the dog on the rug. Softly rising, she crept to the top of the ladder and listened. It was as she suspected—Darracott was not there. Going down a few steps with a candle, she saw his hammock hanging empty from the rafters. Cold with more than the chill of the night, she lay for a long time listening to the wind that stole round the house, seeking for the entry denied it, like the passion that was knocking at John Darracott's heart.

A few days later there came an hour when the wild sou'-

westers fell into a glory of sunlight that matched the celandines in the hedges. Among owners of gardens the talk was of "tetties," of Early Puritans, Blue Wonders and Naygurs' Teeth. The long-drawn note of flies, the hum of bees in the gorse, the breaking of white-tipped waves, all echoed with the tone of forth-looking that makes one doubt what the Celestial City can give more delightsome than the joys of the summer sun.

Here, where the sea is purple and emerald green, pearly blue and opal grey, the earth green and golden, red-brown, or starry with charlock and celandine, primroses and lady-smocks, the cliffs dark and louring, where the glare of whitewashed cottages vies with the scarlet of cactus and geranium, humanity ought surely to borrow something of the eagle's life to match the glory of its background. But up fishy alleys the child is borne with weariness, brought forth with pain and struggles into the narrow lot of care for to-morrow's bread till the gathering winter closes round. Only half a child of the open, he is harassed with fears that the fish knows not, and cares that the bird never felt, for in seeking to gain the mastery of two worlds he has failed in both.

The belly-pinching days when the luggers are kept in the harbour, the shadow of the poorhouse, and of the bursting churchyard where the grass springs from what once felt: no dreams of the gates of pearl that admit to the foursquare city can master the fear of these.

In the broad light that comes with the spring evenings, Thyrza stood at the door of the boathouse waiting for Darracott. It was high tide, and the boat he used to carry him to his work would bring him up close to the house. Mischief was afoot; the sea, the wind, her own nature called, as the breeze blew back the loose hair from her face.

"Oh, John," she cried, running down the sandy spit where he was grounding the boat, "take me out a bit 'Tis getting lateish, and nobody will see us. Do, dear, for I do so want a bit of a change."

She lived the life of a hermit, for it was only in the dark that she could venture out, lest any one should see her coming out of the boathouse. Darracott hesitated, yet he could not bear to refuse her an innocent pleasure like this. In a moment, all panting and aglow, she had stepped on the gunwale of the boat and was beside him.

"You don't mind," she said, "I'm sure nobody will know."

He was silent, as he wrestled with the fluttering sheet of brown sail, whilst, in their swallow-like flight, she held her breath for sheer joy. Taking off her hat, she leant forward, while John watched her, as with parted lips she drank the breath of the sea-wind. At last, as he sat leaning forward with his hand on the rope, she slipped down to the bottom of the boat beside him. With one great shudder he caught her with his left arm and held her close. The sea was darkening now, and with the night there came a sense of the implacable forces that no man can fight.

"You're so strong," she whispered, "I like to feel you there, for you're not against me, but for me."

Her breath caught quickly in her throat for the wind-swept, sun-tanned manhood of him. Then there came a flicker across his face like a sunray on the sea, and she felt his lips on her cheek.

"Ay, lass," he said, "always for you, never against you, don't you think it."

She yielded for a moment or two, while the boat rocked them together, like the beating of their two hearts. Then she cried: "John, let us go back, let us go back."

As he turned the boat round, he heard her low sobbing breaths.

"Don't 'ee, my dear," he said at last, "'tis almost worse than all, that I should ever have brought 'ee to a pass like this."

As he followed her up to their living room, her terrified heart was seeking strength for him rather than for herself. They stood quite still for a full minute. Then, sweeping her off her feet, Darracott caught her to him, and she knew, in the mighty grip of his arms, that Ambrose was still everything to her.

"Let me go!" she cried. "I didn't know that night. No, and not till now, that I'm still his."

"Forgive me, Thyrza," he said, gently putting her down.

"Oh," she cried, "'tis I that am to blame, to come here and bring sorrow on 'ee like this."

"He's everything still to 'ee?"

"Everything."

When he was gone, she stood in the darkness to listen to his footsteps on the cobbles below, and as they were deadened by the sandy hillocks, she knew that he was gone out of her life. Lighting the lamp she fetched water, and began a hard night's work at cleaning the room. It was the last service she would be able to perform for him, and sleep was impossible. When the floor and shelves were scrubbed and neatly rearranged, she laid on the table the jersey she had knitted for him; her own bundle was already packed. It was a difficult matter to find pencil and paper, but at last she discovered a fragment of coarse yellowish notepaper and a pencil stump.

"God bless you, John," she wrote, "for all the rest and peace you have given me. Forget everything else. I am going away to get work, in Appledore if I can, for I want to feel that there's still a friend near me. Thyrza."

By the time John returned in the evening to the boathouse, she had found a berth. The people whom she asked in the village were unanimously of the opinion that Mrs. Peter Quance, of the general shop in Market Street, would be more likely to know of work than any one else. Before Mrs. Quance, Thyrza therefore presented herself. On her left hand she now wore her wedding ring.

"My husband's dead, and I can't get work to Northam," she concluded, after she had told her errand.

"There's the collar factory here, up Factory Ope. You might enquire there," said Mrs. Quance, her round face gleaming moonlike out of the dark background of biscuit tins and sides of bacon. "Or there's the factory to Bideford. You wouldn't get took on in a private house, not without a character."

"I suppose there's no out-door work to be got," said Thyrza doubtfully. "I can handle a boat better than most men. I don't want to do factory work if I can help it."

"Out-door work's not for women," interposed the huge tun-like person who was wedging his Falstaffian person sideways through the doorway. "Though if you'd lend a hand with the ferry, I'm danged if I wouldn't give 'ee a job, now that loitering scoundrel Daggry's failed me."

"Lord, Quance, what old trade you do talk up. Wouldn't folks laugh at a maid working the ferry. 'Tisn't woman's work at all."

"Let 'em laugh. What's a laugh anyway?" said Quance, to whom the idea became alluring now that his wife opposed him. He had had "a few words" with her that morning just a thousand or so.

"I've managed boats pretty nigh all my life," said Thyrza.

"Can 'ee sail and scull? Tell 'ee what, I've a good mind to try it. I can see 'ee now in cap and jersey crying, 'Ferry, sir.' Look at her, Maria," he said, as the girl stood at attention.

"I've got a jersey in my bundle, too," said Thyrza.

"Go upstairs and put 'en on, my dear. Here, missus, take her up. Upon my days, 'twill be a regular take with the visitors, and they'm coming in as thick as cheese-mites in all this warmth."

A few minutes later Thyrza followed the rolling figure of her huge employer down the slip, as amid a fire of witticisms from the loungers on the quay, she started on her first voyage. Rosy-cheeked, with hands that shook, she pushed off and set sail for the Instow side, while Peter sat smoking comfortably, as he instructed her in the matter of sandbanks and currents. Before nightfall the jest of the thing had captured her fancy, and she accomplished her task of calling, "Boat, sir," at the station gates.

The day's work was a good one for Quance, and the rival ferrymen would have fallen tooth and nail on him, if he had not been fierce enough to rope-end the lot of them. Thyrza found one reason for Quance's fancy was decidedly the fact that he calculated the pay for a "faymale" would be about one-third of a man's pay. However, as it included food and a room under the roof, and as Mrs. Quance seemed a decent body, Thyrza struck her queer bargain under the name of Thyrza Minards.

As the three sat at tea in the back parlour, well scented with soap and cheese, Mrs. Quance remarked to Thyrza—

"Back along you must have been a tidy looking maid. Isn't her like 'Lisbeth Ann Pengelly, Quance? But I hope you won't turn like her, though I did get a judgment along of her, the nasty waspish toad."

"Do you believe in judgments, then?" asked Thyrza.

"I don't believe. I know. I've had one. Haven't I, Quance?"

"So you say."

"You know 'tis so," retorted Mrs. Quance, as picking his teeth after a meal of tinned salmon, Quance leant back luxuriously. "'Twas long before I took up with Peter," said Mrs. Quance. "Reuben Isbell, he that lived down Godfrey's Court, was fair wild for 'Lisbeth Ann. A third share he had in the *Saucy Sally*, but it ought by rights to have been the *Luckless Lucy*, for there never was a boat with more mishaps. And 'Lisbeth Ann wouldn't hear of the banns being called home without he'd give her everything right and proper. 'There must be a bed and a dresser, and a chest of drawers, and a clock and a table. Else won't have 'en.' And at that the old Nick went into Reuben Isbell."

Mrs. Quance's hands were trembling as she folded the tablecloth.

"I wasn't so well off then as I be now, and that forenoon one of the church ladies come to see me. Sometimes they'd bring me a half pound of tea. Presently her come back again, all gaspy-like, to know if I'd seen her purse. Though I hadn't so much as glimpsed the back of it, I knew in my innerds her thought I'd got it. Twadn't found, and the talk went buzz, buzz, buzzing about me.

"And all the folks said the *Saucy Sally* must ha' been doing well, for 'Lisbeth Ann got all her wanted and the two got married. Still, I never put the two things together, till the judgment came. And then I knew. And if ever a judgment come straight down from above, that one did. 'Twas just betwixt the night and the morning when there come a shout that fair lifted me out of bed. 'Wake up, all of 'ee, there's a high tide coming that'll sweep the town.'

"I'd thought on a cup of tea the instant I heard the call, but watter was nigh up to my knees when I put foot to floor, and there wasn't the chance of a fire. And my best bonnet, what I kept in a box under the bed——"

"A sopping horror," said Thyrza.

"I couldn't see for the tears," said Mrs. Quance, "for though I piled up everything upon the chest of drawers, they was all of a muck. And there I sot wrapt in the bedclothes—and I saw another lot o' furniture being spoilt too, for the light had come to me. 'The second drawer,' said I, 'that'll reach their dressers and the cheers'll be a-floating afore now. There's them above that knows what I've borne by 'em, and now 'tis their judgment. Every piece of their stolen trade'll fail to bits and 'Lisbeth Ann'll lie on the floor.'

"And then I must ha' nodded, for the next thing I knew there was Reuben Isbell with a cloam taypot in one hand and a cup hitched on to his little finger.

"'Here, missus,' he said, 'I've made a fire and been feeding the court like so many blessed babbies. Here, take a cup o' this.'

"'I wouldn't touch it for forty golden guineas.'

"'Woman's head gone,' saith a. 'Come, drink it up and you'll be able to turn to a bit. The light's coming, thanks be.'

"'Reuben Isbell, is your grand new furniture a-mucksied same as mine?'

"'Iss, 'tis. Worse, I reckon, if anything.'

"'Then 'tis a judgment. 'Twas stolen goods, that I knaw, and so the watter's come down on 'ee. I've seen it this very night.'

"'Will 'ee drink this 'ere tay or no?'

"'That I won't.'

"'Then here goes the tay and the taypot, too.' With that scat went the taypot against the wall of the court.

"'I don't care a rush for the money,' saith a; 'one's all Have and t'other's all Have-nots in this blessed world, and the Haves with so much that they must leave it under a man's very eye—as if to say, "Come, take it." 'Twas but a loan, and I'll pay it back. I'll make a clean breast of it, though I be jailed for it, but I won't let 'ee bear the blame a minute longer.'"

"And was he jailed?" said Thyrza.

"Not he. Paid it back within the two year, and now he plays the concertina of a Sunday afternoon with the baby on his knee. But," said Mrs. Quance, "the looking-glass went crack when I put 'en by the fire to dry, and the mattress I'd to heave over quay. Still, I had a judgment."

As she worked at the ferry for the next two days, Thyrza often strained her eyes towards the bank where Darracott had been working, but at that distance it was impossible to distinguish him from the other men.

She believed that her stay with him had escaped notice, but all the town was agog with interest in the strange spectacle of the ferry girl, and at last the bolt fell from a clear sky.

On the third afternoon, off Appledore Quay the impish figures of three naked children gleamed rosy against the background of sea and sky, where a storm-cloud was beginning to gather. The spirit of merry devilry shot from their muddy little heels as they capered over the slime of the beach, dipping every time they entered the water beneath the anchor-ropes of two black-hulled coalers. Thyrza stood for a moment to watch them, her body swaying above the high sea-boots, for the purchase of which Quance had made an advance of wages, to the motion of the dancing gnomes.

Suddenly she felt an arm flung round her waist, and smelt the reek of a pipe close to her cheek. Quick as a flash she started back, giving the man a push that sent him staggering. At the roars of laughter from the watchers behind, he lost his temper, shouting—

"So I'm not good enough for you, it seems. You'm mighty particular all of a sudden—for a light o' love."

"Hullo! Hullo! What's the meaning of this?" called Peter Quance from the slip. "What the devil are you doing with my ferryman?"

In his jesting tones Thyrza read more than she had heard in the other man's insult. Then, in the ring of faces round her, she saw something that drove the shamed blood back from her cheeks, as though her dress had been rent from head to heel.

She stood for a breath, watching the gap-toothed women who seemed all mouth, the leering men who seemed all eyes. Then she guessed that the secret of her stay at the boathouse had leaked out. For a moment the grey dome of sky at the back of these human gadflies seemed to gather closer round them, as though their thoughts, like Samson's hands, had pulled down the temple walls. As she watched the slime of evil thoughts creeping over the months she had spent with Darracott, she knew the selfish thoughtlessness she had shown in staying there. She shut her eyes, not at the laughter in the eyes around her, but at the trouble she had brought to him.

Flinging down the coil of rope she was carrying, she pushed her way out of the crowd and passed along the quay, thronged now at doors and windows by the mysterious instinct that spreads the news of a fracas. A boy threw a stone that grazed her cheek, and a woman's voice shouted a vile word as she passed.

No one was in Quance's shop, though the yelling boys who followed her glued their eyes to the window-panes. Against their pushing hands Thyrza fastened the door and went upstairs to her room. On the landing outside she swayed for a moment, after the nerve-shattering siege of hate that she had endured. In the close air, reeking of dingy shop and squalid kitchen, she stood trying to get back her composure.

But the sound inside her room roused the reasoned anger that is strength. First there came from within the noise of shuffling footsteps, followed by the opening of a drawer. The next moment she entered to see what she had expected —Mrs. Quance in carpet slippers and an old black shawl bending over the few possessions that Thyrza had laid in the drawers.

"Is there anything you want?" she asked quietly, and at the start Mrs. Quance gave could scarcely, for all her misery, forbear to laugh. "Ah, I thought so," said Thyrza, coming forward and tossing out on the bed a bedraggled ostrich feather. "You're giving this to me, I suppose," she said, "but I don't want it, thank you. I quite understand why you put it there, though. You wanted to make me out a thief."

"That a brazen hussy should dare to speak to me like this," screamed Mrs. Quance. "Why, all the town's agog with the tale of you and John Darracott. He was always a hang-dog fellow —"

"Go out of the room this minute," said Thyrza, her breath coming in pants.

Mrs. Quance took this for fear and laughed tauntingly.

"You're no better than a kept woman, but I suppose you found 'twasn't over-good keep, so you thought you'd try Quance instead. You that I brought into an honest house. You've been here but three nights, and you've stayed your last. I can tell 'ee that."

She was a heavy woman, but with Thyrza's hands on her shoulders she rolled out of the room as though on wheels.

"I'm going in half an hour," said Thyrza, locking the door, "out of this place, where you've the thoughts of devils."

The fierce chastity of a wife, fiercer far than the chastity of mere unknowing girlhood, burnt in her veins like a fever transforming weakness into strength, vacillation into decision, hysteria into the fire of steady anger.

There were not many possessions to be packed; and with a little bundle in her hand, she managed to slip noiselessly down the stairs and out of the house. Hurrying along the street, she took the road that leads out west. Here she was not known, and attracted but little notice as she passed. From the coastguard point there runs up the hillside a lane grown over with branches that form a complete roof in places. Here, with the wind rising every moment, she determined to wait, till at nightfall she would be able to cross the burrows to the boathouse, for she felt it impossible to leave Appledore without seeing Darracott once to warn him of the trouble that was brewing for him.

But the force outside man, a force that plays havoc with all his purposes, was to take the reins of her life in its hands that night. With the quick coming darkness there began the roaring note of sea and wind, a note of rage that Thyrza knew well, as she cowered in the mossy dampness of the tree-roofed lane that leads to the Outlook Field. Miles away in peaceful inland villages the roaring of the ridge that night made heavy sleepers wake, while the foam fell in solid yellow flakes on the fields above the bay. Thyrza was soon drenched to the skin in the torrents of rain, and in many of the houses of Appledore the shutters were closed against the cyclonic violence of the wind.

There came at length a buzzing of the human hive, a mysterious influence that seemed to rise from the very stones, as the women crowded to their doors and the men began to fight their way, inch by inch, to the coastguard point. Out beyond the bar there came through the darkness a red flare, like a steady lightning flash, that was repeated again and again. Thyrza knew what it meant, as it showed against the curtain of blackness over the bay. Panting, dripping, and dishevelled, she fought her way to the life-boat house, where the groups of men and women were gathering rapidly. Within the house there came the steady call of names and the hoarse voice of the cox, fighting a losing match in noise with the roar of the storm.

Thyrza pushed her way steadily to the front, till she could look into the brightly lit house, where the burly figures mustered. Then, whilst her heart beat pantingly as though it would burst from her breast, she heard the whisper, "They're a man short. Beara's to bed ill, and there's his wife."

But they were not short many seconds, for instantly Darracott stepped from the crowd, and, after a curt word or two with the coxswain, fell into line among the regular boat crew. His great frame and herculean build matched the power of the huge lifeboat. As another flare came from the sea and was answered from the coastguard, the boat slid forward with a "heave-ho" from the crew. Unseen, Thyrza touched the oilskins of the last man: it was Darracott, but he never noticed her.

In the exaltation of the moment, Thyrza saw nothing but the face that had passed her so close that she could mark the firm-set lips, could see the dazzle of the rings in his ears.

Slowly, while she stood leaning by the low wall, the watchers drifted away to seek shelter from the pitiless rain, till only a woman or two remained, doggedly refusing the offered hospitality of the houses along the cliff, being either too dazed or too tired to move. Ultimately they all disappeared save Thyrza.

Hours seemed to her to pass, till at length there came out of the dark void once more the light that meant the lifeboat was returning with its load.

In a few minutes the point was crowded again, and Thyrza had to fight to keep her footing by the wall. In the struggle she scarcely noticed the shout that came from the shore, as the dark outline of the boat became visible through the spray, but a woman sobbed softly by the side of her, "They'm safe, and they've got 'em."

In the press Thyrza's arm was almost broken but she thought of nothing but the wave-washed boat that rose and fell outside the surf.

"There's my man," cried her neighbour. Then the news passed through the crowd, "They've saved the crew, but the boat capsized and righted herself again."

There was something more, Thyrza felt sure, as she fought her way out close to the slip. Before she reached it, she knew what it was: there was a man missing from the crew. At last she pushed her way out to the dripping figure of the coxswain, outlined in yellow oilskins against the light.

"Iss," she heard him say, "Darracott's gone; didn't rise again when she righted herself. Struck on the head, I reckon. 'Tis the first we've lost from this lifeboat. The *Marie Roget's* had her baptism to-night."

Then, as he saw Thyrza's eyes on him, the old man poured out a lava stream of curses that reeked from his great lips, till the bystanders began to laugh.

As she stood in the open space on the slip, she knew that the whisper was going round against her. She was Darracott's woman—and she was proud of it. Lifting her head bravely, she watched the ring of faces, as though they had assembled to do her honour.

At last a woman stepped forward and caught her by the arm. "Come with me, my dear," she said; "you'm wet through and worn out, and I doubt but that you've nowhere to go. Come home with me."

She was a great gap-toothed, lusty woman, in a bodice kept together with pins. In the morning she had joined in the hue and cry after Thyrza, but to-night she was all womanly towards this bitter need.

Holding Thyrza firmly Mrs. Bovey pushed her way through the crowd, that made a lane for them now, a guard of honour, indeed, and the only one that Thyrza would ever know. At length they reached the tiny house in Market Street where Mrs. Bovey lived. In the relief of rest from the constant deluges of rain which she had been enduring, Thyrza sank gratefully into an old beehive chair by the hearth.

"My man's to Cardiff," said Mrs. Bovey, as she watched the girl's white set face, "so you can bide to-night. There's naught but chillern here," she laughed.

Two brats sprawled in front of the fire, playing with a mangy kitten, and others were a-bed in the close, poverty-stricken room upstairs.

"He was your man, wasn't he?" asked Mrs. Bovey.

"Not like you mean," said Thyrza, awaking to a sense of her surroundings. "Not same as you all thought. John had nought like other men. But he's paid back now, he's paid back."

Mrs. Bovey thought her visitor's wits were wandering. Hastily lifting the sleeping baby from the packing-box which was his cradle, she brought him to Thyrza. "Look," she said, "we've woke him between us."

The baby's fists were squaring and his face puckering against the coming yell. At the noise Thyrza burst into a passion of tears.

"Oh," she cried, "he never had a child, never, never, John never had."

Mrs. Bovey stood gently patting her guest's shoulders, while she rocked the screaming child on her other arm.

"He was a good man," said Thyrza, "and took me in when I'd nowhere to go. And I gave 'en a bad name, though I never meant to. I gave 'en a bad name."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Bovey gently, "I reckon there's no call to fret over that; for he's gone where a bad name doesn't matter, for there we'm known as we be."

"Known as we be:" it was the word that comforted Thyrza most, as she lay that night listening to the sea that beat above John Darracott's body. For him no storied urn, no animated bust, only the rough and homely words of a shrew and the worship of an erring woman's heart.

Yet beyond the gates of dawn, where men are stripped of everything save the truth, John Darracott must stand high indeed.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONSTANTINE'S BANNER

"STOP your gorging, John," cried Mrs. Rosevear, rushing to the window, "for there's Miss Westaway coming across the green. She'll be here in two minutes, and us won't want you buzzing round, all ears and eyes."

It was the sweetest hour in the day, that of the labourer's late tea, but John Rosevear knew better than to disobey. Accordingly he gulped down his cup of tea, and swallowing a last mouthful of bacon, betook himself to the circle at the forge, for there could be no bar of the "Blue Boar" or of the "Royal George" for the likes of Chrissie's husband.

In a trice she had cleared away the dirty cups and saucers, and brewed a fresh pot of tea for her visitor.

"You're not very much surprised to see me, I think, Mrs. Rosevear," said Damaris.

"No, I dunno as I am; but you'll take a cup of tea, miss, and there's an apple-turnover, if you could fancy one."

Damaris sat down, watching Chrissie out of the corner of her eye, as the woman waited on her.

"Chrissie," she said at last, "Thyrza didn't die that night. And she came here to you. But you wouldn't tell, for she trusted you."

"However did 'ee know?" gasped Mrs. Rosevear, standing with arms akimbo.

"I only guessed, for you were always the one she fled to. In her worst trouble before, you were good to her. So I knew."

"Ay," said Chrissie, "I wouldn't give the cheeld up to any man of 'em all. But you're a woman and that's different. Besides, you're wiser than me."

It was the greatest concession that Chrissie had ever made.

"Yes," she continued, "she come here, and like a fool I let her go the next morning. She swore solemn she was going to Mrs. Velly."

"Where did she go, then?"

"To John Darracott, and with him she's been all this time. I never knowed it till yesterday, though. For then a cousin of John's come over here and told us how she's been living with Darracott, and how she worked at the ferry, till it got about that she was a loose woman."

"Ah; no, no!" exclaimed Damaris, "she loved her husband."

"I didn't say 'twas true what they thought, did I?" demanded Chrissie fiercely. "But I reckon she felt he didn't want her, and there was but one man that did. That's of it, you may depend."

"Then," said Damaris, starting up, "where is the girl, now that Darracott is dead?"

"Biding with a woman that's took her in. But I reckon she'd be the better for a helping hand now. She's pretty nigh at the last stand, I'll warn."

"God grant I'll not be too late," said Damaris, as she stood up to go back to the inn. She could scarcely arouse Appledore that night, but she would be there the first thing in the morning.

Cold like the grey light on the face of the dead, the dawn was creeping slowly over the sandy reaches of the Torridge next morning. The tide was out and the river but a sandy stream between sand-banks, where three ketches lay aground in the mud. The revolving light from the dunes flickered sickly yellow across the waterway, as Thyrza came to the door of the boathouse, her eyes idly following the powdery spray of sand that the wind sifted incessantly over the surface of the burrows. She had slept in the old place last night, and now she was leaving it, for Darracott's sister was coming over from Clovelly to take away the furniture. Thyrza slipped the new key under the mat at the top of the ladder, for somewhere outside the bar the old key was shifting in Darracott's pocket.

With her pack strapped across her shoulders she walked away. There was no fear of insult now, but she was leaving early merely to avoid the kindly anxiety that would have bidden her stay. For rough and cruel as they are in certain aspects, waifs are often unselfishly tendered by the fisherfolk and Thyrza remembered just now the little offerings of fish that had been left at Mrs. Bovey's door for her.

From the road that looks down the whole length of the burrows, she leant over a field gate to take a last look at the boathouse. Now, from where she stood, the fat rooks that rose from the newly ploughed land loomed larger in her eyes than the black speck that represented Darracott's boathouse. So time blots out the past and the lives that are part of it.

Turning slowly away, Thyrza resumed her walk towards Northam. From thence she meant to make for Bideford, to try for work at the factory. For as Darracott had faced the slow ache of the long days, so could Thyrza now.

To avoid the dust of a carriage that was approaching, she stood for a moment by the stone that marks Bloody Corner, where Hubba the Dane was defeated by the Saxons. The driver, as the carriage passed, pointed it out to the solitary occupant of the wagonette. It was Damaris

Westaway, and in a moment, before Thyrza could collect her wits, she was being driven on to Northam by the side of the mistress of Tonacombe.

Thyrza was white with anger, as Damaris drew her away from the inn door, where the carriage put them down, into the churchyard and round to the famous corner where she had been found by Ambrose in those old days that now seemed centuries ago.

"Why did you bring me here?" she cried.

"Sit down there," said Damaris, pointing to a seat, "for we must fight this thing out, you and I."

"I heard everything," panted Thyrza.

"I know it."

"And you that have taken him, you come back to me like this."

"If you heard all, you know that I have not taken him. He is yours, now and always. I know why you ran away. 'Twas because you wouldn't be outdone in nobility by me."

"You say that?" whispered Thyrza.

"Yes, I say it. For I know you, even better than you know yourself, and far better than he knows you."

"Have you heard what they say about me down there?"

"Yes, Chrissie Rosevear told me."

"She, too. My Heavens! Has all the world naught to do but to blacken me?"

"But I know there was nothing but honour between you and Darracott."

"Oh," said Thyrza, rocking herself to and fro, "and that's true. For there never was a better man on God's earth. That's why he's out yonder now, I suppose," she added bitterly.

"To the noblest, Thyrza, life's often a burden," said Damaris quietly.

They were both silent for a long while, till, taking her courage in her hands, Damaris said: "I want to tell you about these last weeks. When you left, your husband's one thought was for you, his one effort to find you. He left no stone unturned. Did you never see the notices in the papers?"

"We never saw a paper, not unless it wrapped up a parcel."

"If you had, perhaps you might feel differently, for he wants you. Deep down, 'tis you that are dearest to him, not I. And if you've something to forgive, that is always a woman's lot."

"Oh, where is he now?"

"Superintending the building of the Oratory, but he did not want to go. It was I who persuaded him to leave the task of finding you to me. But I thought it would be a long search, and indeed it would have been, but for Darracott's death and the consequent talk."

"Then he's not been with you?"

"I've never seen him since the night you left the manor-house. Thyrza, how will you be able to live without him?"

The words of Mrs. Leggo at Galsworthy came back to the girl, "he's arms full against arms empty": and to Thyrza empty arms made the ultimate tragedy of life.

"So," said Damaris, "there's nothing hidden from you anywhere. Your baby boy is waiting for you, as well as Ambrose. And, perhaps, the flutter of life once more at your heart, Thyrza," she whispered. "Can you forego the very thing that life means to you?"

Thyrza's face was working terribly.

"He's just all the world to you," continued Damaris, "and he wants you. If you had seen him, as I did, when he found you were gone, you would know it."

When Thyrza slipped a hand along the bench Damaris knew she had won.

Late that night they stood watching the street from a window of the New Inn, at Bideford. Then, as they caught sight of the hotel omnibus approaching, Damaris got up. Thyrza caught her hand, white-lipped and trembling, but Damaris said quietly, "Yes, he'll be in that, I expect."

Out in the semi-darkness of the passage she stood for a moment to watch the top of the stairs which led to their sitting-room. Against the brightness of the room within she saw Ambrose pause for a moment, as the waiter stood back. Then the door was shut quickly, but not till the watcher heard a half-stifled cry from Thyrza.

So at last the child had found rest on the heart that loved her truly enough, though with divided affection, for such is a man's way.

Before they came out to look for her, Damaris was driving back to Hartland. As she let down the window in the darkness of the night that seemed to rush past her, there flamed in front a moon crescent that seemed, in her elation, like the cross that pulsed in the sky before the heathen Emperor. For, like Constantine, by this sign, she, too, had conquered. Then the high moment passed and a few bitter tears smarted in her eyes. Yet, over at Tonacombe there were children waiting for her help, and at Hartland there was an old man fuming at the lateness of her arrival. Also, in time to come, there would be much fine work, the truer for this baptism of pain.

So Damaris, too, faced the future, and with glance as gallant as the eyes with which John Darracott had gone out over the bar.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CLEAR SHINING OF A STAR

THE door of the empty Oratory swung noiselessly behind her as Damaris walked up the aisle and sank into a seat. It was her first sight of the building that had, long ago, made Ambrose Velly's fame, and as she gazed about her, she smiled at the remark of a stranger whom she had passed in the porch.

"What I like in his work is that there's nothing cheap about it," he had said.

Assuredly there was nothing cheap about this building, for its foundations had been laid in the effort of many lives besides that of the thinker whose brain had first conceived it.

All around, close to the very walls, were squalid houses festering with human misery, yet here the fluted pillars, rising to the groined roof, held up, like the cup that is formed by uplifted hands, a chalice of beauty that waited for the dew and the rain and the sun from overhead. The high spaces of the roof were shadowy now, as the sunlight faded, but in the carving of the screen she could detect the hand of Ambrose himself. Born of the earth, vivid and living, were the beasts and plants that started from its outlines. The dusk fell slowly, like incense from an unseen censer, while in the light from the windows the tracery of their arches gleamed in black lines. There was no colour anywhere, no splendour of purple and gold: only the whiteness of the hand held up.

For what? True, the thing was restful, the moments when it spoke, an uplift. Yet Thyrza had knocked often on the closed walls of a heart; Darracott had lost his homely bliss; she herself, with hosts of friends, had missed the woman's prize. And in Ambrose much had died: some baseness, much selfishness, and a little joy. She never saw him now, but she knew very well that "The Wind among the Barley" was just an echo now to him, an echo from the earlier world of his youth.

And round the uplifted hand still foamed the sea of misery. The work of many, beside her father and herself, had been, and would be, spent, yet still the sea was undried. And, though it rose from their midst, the hand said nothing to those who needed its message most.

Still the darkness fell as she sat on, until the tide that beats on the cliffs of Hartland seemed to echo in her ears, even in this midland city of labour. At last, through the window over the altar, there shone the radiance of a solitary star. Between the fingers of the uplifted hand there had pierced one ray from the unseen depths of space.

The laughter of joy that fades, the victories that leave scars, the sorrows that often harden, passion building the walls of life, and lust the foundation of its structure: such is the human lot to-day.

But out of the unseen peers the star, and even from the heights of this life there are hands uplifted to its clear shining, hearts that answer to its hope.

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